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LIFESTORY AS THEOLOGY

A Spiritual Autobiography

by

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to

Dr. William L. Malcomson

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PREFACE

In the fall of 1974 I decided to go back to school for my Doctor of Ministry degree at the American Baptist Seminary of the West through the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. I had been thirteen years as a minister at the Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church in Oakland, California, and while I felt no impulse to seek a new location, I did feel the need for some new challenge. The church generously granted me whatever time would be necessary over the next two years to complete this degree program, and my staff offered its assistance to take on a heavier share of responsibility.

Out of that program emerged a startling new desire for me -- the desire to write. Actually it was not a new desire, for it had been with me always, but the belief I could do it was new, even though I had been writing copy for radio messages and sermons for thirteen years. Centering my academic work around an exploration into mysticism and communication of the inner life, I was soon struck with the possibilities of writing about my own spiritual odyssey as many others had done, such as Augustine, Madame Guyon, Gandhi, Thomas Merton, Victor Frankl, and a host of others. When it came time for me to write a professional paper in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the requirement of the degree, I asked for and was given permission to

write my own lifestory as theology. I wrote it for the average person, such as listens to me on my radio broadcast, with the hope that someday it might merit publication.

My guiding conviction has been that our best talk about God is done through sharing our lifestories, that the Gospel is best explained and best understood when it is personalized. This is how we maintain the human element in an industrial society, how we retain our personal uniqueness in an impersonal age, how we assess what is wrong with us and what is right with us and how we got that way. Most of all, it is one way that we learn about God and how God is always helping us get from being less than we want to be to becoming what we are meant to be.

My creditors for this enterprise are many: William Malcomson, my faculty advisor who first encouraged me to undertake the effort; my doctorate committee who met with me faithfully and offered constructive advice and support; Ada Grace Cralle who read copy; Ward Tabler who taught me to be both clear and concise; my church and staff who gave me the time I needed to be away from the job; and most of all, my wife, Beverly, who listened to and appreciated every word as it was written. As the deadline for this work drew near and as time often spread itself thin for me, I was especially touched to learn that a number of people in my church had been praying for me. From such a wellspring of concern and support has come the completion of this litary effort, and I am grateful for all that has made it possible.

Because this story is all essentially true, some names and details have been changed to avoid embarrassment to the persons involved. I set this chronicle forth as the offering of myself in the hope that whoever reads it might gain the courage to tell his or her lifestory in some way at some time, and to know the freedom that comes from doing so.

PROLOGUE

From his tepee, through the clear, exhilarating morning air, the Shoshoni Indian beheld a lustrous rim of light shining from the mountain top. This radiant mountain crown was like a diadem of gems glittering from a snowy peak, and from the lips of the Shoshoni broke forth the ancient greeting to the new day, "Ee-dah-how." It was a summons for the camp to arise and begin the labors of the day as well as an expression of gratitude for continuation of the life that is reborn each morning from the fading dusk of yesterday.

A literal translation of Ee-dah-how is, "Behold, the sun coming down the mountain." Idaho, the place where rose my daybreak star, is a poetic translation of that Shoshoni word, which interpreted freely means, "Gem of the Mountains."

I can find no better name for this Spirit Journey than that Shoshoni expression, SUN ON THE MOUNTAIN. It enshrines my early history. It summons me to lean close to the earth of my being that I might hear the voice of the Great Spirit calling me to be a self. It sends me forth as a relative to all that is, to cover my mountains with a lighted reverence for life which the darkness cannot overcome, to the end that, in the words of Black Elk, I may "face the winds and walk the good road to the day of quiet."

CHAPTER I

NOTHING MUCH EVER HAPPENED IN ARCO

The road stopped abruptly, falling away into a deep washout. I eased the car over to the side of the road and shut off the ignition switch.

"I guess we walk from here," I said to Beverly.

We got out and started up the road on foot, not a road as much as just two wheel tracks cutting a swath through the narrow bottom of the canyon and winding its way up to where the pine covered slopes began their steep ascent to the rounded dome of Bell Mountain. I knew every turn of that mountain trail, although it had been more than twenty-five years since I had been on it. I knew it so well that I knew where to look for the Indian paint brushes and columbines along the way and where to step to avoid the stinging nettles.

As we climbed, the sound of a trickling stream came to our ears. "The sweetest and coldest water you'll ever taste," I told Beverly, and then remembered that was precisely what my father used to say.

The road opened out into a clearing in the trees, and there at the edge of an overgrown little meadow stood an old log cabin, the first home I had known on this earth. Yet somehow this cabin was but a miniature version of the one I had carried in my memory for so many years. Even the clearing in front of the cabin looked only half as big as it

it used to be. Of course, the last time I had seen this place I had been a child, looking at it from childish perspective. It was reasonable that it should look smaller now.

The roof had collapsed on the cabin, and as I pushed in the door, some little creature scurried from under the debris and ran out the window. In the corner stood the old iron cookstove that I remembered so well, and above it the shelf, with its tattered oilcloth covering that once held a variety of things from carbide lamps to ore samples, still clung to the wall. I picked up part of an old Sears Roebuck catalog from the rubbish. It was dated 1937.

I drew a deep breath and found it difficult to hold a clear pattern of connected thought. I felt the need just to sit and meditate, to bring the jumbled emotions of my heart into focus with what my eyes were seeing, and to sort out the memories that were pushing their way out of the file with the discovery of each well-remembered object or spot.

Outside the cabin I stood and looked around. There at the corner, where the nettles grew so tall, was the place where I had fallen one day. I brushed a stalk against my arm and saw the red welts appear simultaneously. Beyond the nettles and through a grove of quaking aspens and pines was where Dan and Dick had built the tree house with the carved warning: KEAP OUT! Behind the cabin still stood the little pine latrine that Dad had called a "two-holer" because he had carved one of the holes smaller for us. Against the edge of the stream I could see the goose-

berry bushes where more than one stomach ache had evolved from over-indulgence of the green berries. My eyes, starting up from the clearing, could follow the faint outline of the trail that led to Dad's mine and beyond that the rock slide where we would go to roll rocks, just to see how far down they would go and how many others they would take with them.

After all these years how very much the same it was, and yet something was ineffably different. It was not just the look of neglect and desolation that touched everything. It was not that everything now looked tinier. No, it was I who had changed. The layer of years and experiences I brought with me to that place meant that I could never again see and enjoy it as I had when I was a child. Something precious and fragile was lost forever, and all that remained were the memories. It would never again be as it was.

I looked down the road from which we had come to the blue-gray valley and the distant rim of mountains etched sharply against the sky. Beyond that valley and those sun-tinted hills was Arco, the little town where it had all started for me. The journey back had begun.

In 1937, when I was six years old, the town of Arco, Idaho, county seat of Butte County, listed a population of 572. Founded in 1879 on the bend of the Big Lost River where three wagon trails met and crossed, the origin of the name is unclear. Some say it was for a visiting Count Arco from Australia; others claim it was for an early

settler named Arco Smith; still others maintain it was named Arco simply because it was on a bend in the river.

The town lay at the edge of a desert against the backdrop of Wildcat Peak which reared its craggy cliffs as the termination point of the Lost River Range. The traveler coming from the south had to cross fields of black lava, the remnants of a volcanic eruption that had left caves, spattercones, craters, and terraces in eerie and strangely unreal terrain. The traveler from the east had to traverse nearly seventy miles of sagebrush wastelands that sloped into distant foothills covered with cedar and mahogany trees, a lonely country whose solitude was disturbed mainly by jackrabbits, rattlesnakes, and coyotes. Arco, when approached by either of these routes, loomed as an oasis nestled against the hills under cover of the cottonwood trees that lined the banks of the river. This river watered the valley to the west where a number of ranchers had settled, then meandered its way leisurely into the lava desert where it disappeared, thus giving rise to its name -- the Lost River.

Arco had one wide mainstreet, and, other than a post office and a few stores, offered little for entertainment beyond a few saloons, a poolroom, a theater which showed old films on weekends only, and an annual fall rodeo. In its description of Arco, The Idaho State Encyclopedia is brutally frank: "Points of interest -- there are none." It failed to note that high school students climbed Wildcat Peak each year and painted their class numerals on its rocky sides, leaving numbers dating back to 1920 which are still seen there today. But aside from that,

nothing much ever happened in Arco.

There were two churches, the Mormon and the Baptist. Mormons constituted at least 60% of the population of Arco and its environs, having infiltrated from Utah in a zealous effort to propagate their faith. They were mostly farmers and, for the most part, were good, honest people, although a bit overbearing in their proselytizing efforts. The Baptist Church was a lump aggregate of all the church people who weren't Mormons, a small handful of Protestant assortment who met in the old lava rock church across from the school and who never managed to keep a minister more than a few years because of an inability to pay more than starvation wages. To be honest, one would also have to say that the Baptists were often more earnest in combatting Mormonism than in presenting Christianity, but unfortunately that's the way minorities sometimes have to survive.

In 1950 the Atomic Energy Commission needed 40,000 acres of wasteland for a nuclear testing station and selected its site in the drought-ridden lava sinks and desert flats near Arco. Little Arco got ready for an atomic boom. A four page spread in Life Magazine showed pictures of a sleepy little main street preparing to wake up to a population explosion. There was a temporary boom which looked to old-timers in Arco like the biggest westward surge since the gold rush. Arco did become the first city in the world to be lighted by atomic power, but after a few years of excitement, it eased back into its old patterns with most of the several thousand workers at the atomic site settling into Idaho Falls or Pocatello on the other edge of the desert,

towns with distinct urban advantages over Arco.

It is a little difficult to say what keeps small towns alive, and some might dispute whether they are truly alive. Arco was there originally as a junction and trading post for ranchers and miners, and once established, it remained because people chose to remain, probably more because of the accustomed habit of getting used to a place rather than from any special love for Arco. There was a point in my late adolescence when I would have condemned Arco with Gertrude Stein's description, "There is no there there." Charming places existed in this world, I was sure, but Arco was not one of them. Those were the days when I was straining to fly from the nest and could see only the limitations of my tribal village rather than what it did for me. For it was in Arco, and its surrounding deserts, valleys and mountains that I discovered life, love, work, sex, death and God, and where all the roots that are still part of me found the soil in which they began to grow.

When I arrived on the scene in Arco, it was because my grandparents, John and Margaret Taylor, had decided to leave Wyoming and come out to Idaho. They were poor people in search of a better life. They crossed the Big Horn Mountains in a covered wagon, and my mother, four years old, rode her horse alongside that wagon all those miles. They might have turned their wagon in one of a hundred directions, but for some reason they came to Arco, and because they did, I came to Arco also, although I arrived a bit later. My grandfather first drove a freight wagon for one of the mines, and then later became a rancher.

North of Arco and beyond the Lost River Range lies the Little Lost River Valley. The Little Lost River, like its counterpart, the Big Lost, also sinks in the desert, giving life to a valley before its mysterious demise. In this valley my grandparents leased a ranch and began to wrest their livelihood from the soil.

Twelve years after their arrival into Idaho, my mother, then sixteen, married a young mining prospector, a nominal Mormon from Utah whose dream of wealth had lured him to the Little Lost Mountains to hunt for gold. They made their home in Bell Mountain Canyon in a one-room cabin with a dirt floor, built from pines my dad felled and trimmed. For several years this was their existence.

Three sons were born rather quickly, each seeing the light of day for the first time in Arco, which then boasted one old doctor and a midwife whose home was the only resemblance to a hospital within a hundred miles. I was the third son, and I arrived during one of Dr. Barr's periodic rounds with alcohol, ushered into this world, I was told, to the accompaniment of his hiccups. But a sadder fact than that marked my entrance. By the time I got here, the marriage of my mother and father was nearly over. Privation, loneliness, and hardship had made life in that canyon unendurable for my mother. My father refused to give up his vision of a gold mine that would make him wealthy beyond his highest dreams and continued until his dying day his hopeless search for a bonanza. Three years after I arrived, we left that canyon -- my mother, my brothers, and I -- but Dad remained.

We moved back to the ranch with my grandparents for a while and then to Arco where Mother went to work, first in a county sewing room for a dollar a day and later as a cook on neighboring ranches. Those were difficult years as they have been told to me and as I remember them. We were incredibly poor with barely enough to eat, barely enough to wear, and never enough fuel to keep a fire in the woodstove that heated our house. Dan and Dick would often slip down to the railroad tracks at night with gunny sacks to pick up any loose coal that might have fallen from the cars as they were unloaded that day.

Then when I was nine, my mother married a sheep rancher from the Little Lost Valley, and we moved back, this time to a rambling old house in a grove of cottonwoods with fields and meadows stretching on all sides to the mountains that rimmed the valley. It was my first taste of what might be called comparative prosperity.

I was in the fourth grade then, transported from a comfortable brick schoolhouse in Arco where every grade had its own room and its own teacher to a little one-room frame building where one teacher taught all eight grades. I rode horseback the mile and a half distance from our ranch to the school, sometimes through the warm, delightful days of autumn when the meadowlarks sang their final songs of the season, sometimes through snowdrifts that closed the roads to cars, and sometimes through the swirling floodwaters of spring when the Little Lost overflowed its banks.

I was happy in a strange way, but I had grown up a shy and withdrawn child, unsure of my own identity and security. Living with various relatives during the years that Mother worked had left me uncertain as to where I really belonged. My stepfather was an industrious rancher and a good man, but he was totally unprepared suddenly to be a father to three growing boys. He was a stranger to us for many years, and for this reason I was left with the feeling I was more a guest in his home than a child of his family. Happily I lost that sense of estrangement as I grew older, and, when Verl and Dixie came, offspring of my mother and stepfather, the ties of filial affection were finally established that made us a true family.

When I was younger, my brothers, Dan and Dick, four and three years older than I, endured me with the specified tolerance of big brothers towards littler. They were both on their own before they were sixteen, so real closeness did not develop for us until we were older.

Visits back to my father in his canyon retreat were frequent when I was younger, but, after Mother's marriage, they became less occasional and finally ceased altogether. Since the nearest ranch was several miles from us, there was little opportunity for friendship with anyone my own age, and besides, there was little time for it since every youngster in that valley was a part of the family work force in the fields or out on the range as soon as he or she was old enough to sit astride a horse.

Hence, I grew up in my own private world, a kind of imaginary sphere enriched by the books I devoured and enlivened by the plots I spun out in my mind for myself to enact, a world of devotion to animals and appreciation for nature, but a world strangely devoid of people and many close personal relationships.

High school was not an easy experience for me, as you will see in a later chapter, because of a dominating shyness and lack of a sense of self worth. In fact, I occasionally struggle with both of these yet today, although not often, and I have finally come to feel that I was intensely privileged to have the childhood that I did. In spite of the loneliness and hardship that marked part of it, many great gifts were offered to me then, gifts which are still paying their dividends. It took me a long time to appreciate the value of those early years, but I suspect this is a part of what maturity brings -- the ability to redeem our past by realizing its worth instead of feeling sorry for ourselves because we think we were mistreated or unfortunate in some way. I think our Creator helps us do this because by some mysterious process, which I do not fully understand, when we set out to discover God, we also get involved in the discovery of our own essence as a child of God. It is then that a sense of our true worth begins to enter in.

I have also learned, since I have begun to read the genesis of my own creation, that there is a greater fact than my own search for selfhood or God, and that is God's search for me. The incredible love that guides our footsteps safely home at last may be beyond our comprehension to analyze, but without it we would perish. It is partly that

discovery that has motivated me to tell my lifestory. Perhaps someone reading it will find some of his or her chains falling away.

Most of my early life I battled fears of inferiority. I have been the original Apostle of Inadequacy, struggling with the phantoms that no one liked me, that I could do nothing well, that I didn't count. I am no longer interested in trying to find out how I got that way as I am in trying to correct those impressions, for I know now that many people like me, that I can do a number of things well, that I do count. This book is more than just one man's account of how he climbed out of his pit of self-deception; it is a tribute to the voices of faith and love that have said to me, "It's all right to be you." This has been resurrection for me, and I cherish it as the possibility for each of you who read this.

The sun was low on the horizon as I turned the car around and Beverly and I started back towards Arco, the place where nothing much ever happened. Nothing much, except that's where the pattern for my lifestory was measured and cut, and that's where the fabric of me was stretched on the loom. In the dying rays of a sun touching familiar mountains I sang my hymn of thanks and knew at last I was ready to write it down.

CHAPTER II

THE AGONY AND THE ECSTASY OF MNEMONICS

"Nothing is lost, but it can never be again as it was. You will only find the bits and cry out because they were yourself."[1] As I read these words by Loren Eiseley from his autobiography, I understood some of the overcast of pain that came to me that day when I went back to the log cabin where my awareness of life had begun. Yet the pain was pierced by a powerful, undergirding sense of life. This is one of the rich gifts of memory: it is always active, never passive. Its strongest quality is its ability to create and transform, for as Nicolas Berdyaev said, "There is a life-giving power in memory: memory seeks to conquer death."[2]

I am writing this as a creative effort of my mind to bring my past into my present and understand it a little better, for to remember something clearly is to come from under any oppressing shadow that memory may have cast. Knowledge of our own existence is how we gain knowledge of our world. At the deepest and most basic levels, everything that has happened to me has happened to everyone else, so that which is

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[1]Loren Eiseley, All the Strange Hours (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), p. 5.

[2]Nicolas Berdyaev, Dream and Reality (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951), p. xii.

lifestory for one in some mystical way becomes lifestory for all. Rejection, anxiety, self-acceptance, and love are themes in my story, and these are among the common denominators of the human story.

I dread the brand of egocentricity that may be laid to this autobiographical effort. I seek neither pity nor praise. What I seek most wholeheartedly is knowledge of self and knowledge of God, for I believe to seek an understanding of one's own image is also to seek a knowledge of one's ultimate destiny. Our very earliest memories may have no apparent significance that we can readily see. Often some inconsequential little vignette seems to lodge itself near the surface of our conscious mind and thrusts itself out of a hazy surrounding to stand stark and seemingly unrelated to anything else. Yet there is reason and relatedness in all that we choose to remember.

The very first thing I am able to recall is being lifted out of a warm bed and carried, wrapped in blankets, into a cold night and placed on the back seat of a car. There was a long ride somewhere, but the remainder of that event and the persons in it are shrouded. There is a kind of anxiety that surrounds that remembrance, as though I were being taken into an alien realm, but, beyond what I have just described, nothing is clear. I have discussed this memory with my mother, but she has no line of association for it.

The earliest mental souvenir I have from my first location in Bell Mountain Canyon is a little white kitten that I used to carry around in a tin pail. I was apparently in the toddling stage, but

recollection of that kitten and the pail is sharp and distinct.

I have no remembrance of my father and mother together. I was three when they separated, and for some reason my conscious mind refuses to link them together. Perhaps one of the gifts of our early years is the ability to filter out the traumatic and hold to the less hurtful occurrences with which we are better equipped to deal. The unhappiness of my parents was quiet rather than violent, and it is even possible that I was not aware of it, although I doubt that. The tiniest baby is susceptible to anything that threatens its security. Nevertheless, for some reason I am not able to recall Mother and Dad together in any mutual encounter.

After we left the canyon, my mother, my two brothers, and I lived for a short time with my grandparents at their ranch. Two memories of physical pain are prominent. The first is my falling from a trailer when no one was home except my mother's oldest brother. I cut a deep gash in my forehead, the scar of which faintly remains. I must have been screaming in pain because Uncle Leonard came out of the house with an annoyed expression on his face that was even more discomforting than the accident itself. I was told years later he was a reluctant babysitter that day, and my tumble from the trailer didn't help much.

The other mental engraving of pain has to do with the time when my mother accidentally drove the needle of her treadle sewing machine completely through her finger. I still retain the picture of

her face, totally drained of color, as she got up and walked outside to find my grandfather. She never made an outcry, even when he tried to pull the needle out with pliers, but I could not bear what I knew she was suffering, and I ran and hid behind the house.

There are other hazy memories of that period, like the time Dick and Dan set the barn on fire trying to smoke dried cow manure wrapped in pages from the mail order catalog. Once they told me that licking the salt block, placed in the corral for the cows and horses, was also a good thing for people if they wanted to grow tall; so I went faithfully to take my turn until my horrified mother discovered it and made me stop. How clearly I remember the day I fell into a deep hole and spent the better part of a terrified afternoon trying to climb out while avoiding the nests of huge spiders that seemed to be everywhere. The memory of the welcoming arms of my grandfather reaching down to lift me out is one of the most lifegiving moments I have recorded.

After we moved from my grandfather's ranch to Arco, the retention path becomes easier to follow, principally because I was older. Those years stand out as the loneliest and most painful of all. The greatest unhappiness of that period was separation from my mother, necessitated by the fact that she worked as a cook at different ranches and mines. We stayed with various relatives, and, though I was never abused or mistreated in any way, I always knew that I was not a real part of any family. Many nights after I was in bed, I cried myself to sleep because I had no sense of belonging. I blame no one for any of it. In fact, I am

grateful now as I consider the sacrifices that were made for me in those post-depression years. It was a severe and fearful time for many, and had it not been for the willingness of my Aunt Mary and Uncle Keith, my grandparents, and others to make a place for my brothers and me in their homes, I don't know what we would have done.

It was during that time in life I learned to hate oatmeal and canned spinach. We always had plenty of each, the former because it was cheap and the latter because it was available on county surplus for poor people, and to this day I have the greatest difficult swallowing those two foods without gagging. A whiff of either and those poverty-tinged years return to me in force.

One of the warmest memories I have of people surrounds my grandmother. She was not a dominant woman, but she was the stabilizing force in our family for all the years she was alive. It was she who brought us all together for holiday occasions and who sustained all of us with a sense of family unity and solidarity. Life was never easy for my grandmother. She had lived on an Indian reservation as a bride where my grandfather was an agent, and then followed his nomadic trail from lumber camps to mining claims, from dry farms to bartending. She had given birth to six children and had buried one along a wagon trail in Wyoming. She never lived in a modern house until she was nearly ready for the next world, and she never knew material affluence in any way. Yet she was a person rich in the things that counted who faced life with an unbroken serenity. It was she, more than anyone else in my early

years, who awakened a religious consciousness within me. I have met few people in this world who have embodied such a self-giving spirit of accepting love as she. The path to her doorway was worn smooth by the feet of hundreds who came to pour out their troubles to Manny Taylor. It was Dan, my oldest brother and her first grandchild, who bestowed on her the title of Manny, a childish corruption of Granny. From thereon she was known by everyone in Lost River Valley as Manny Taylor. When she died in 1953, her funeral was packed with people from the length and breadth of that valley who knew and loved her for her qualities of understanding and compassion.

When I think of her now, I see her sitting on the porch in the early evening as the twilight is wrapping the countryside in a gentle stillness, looking out upon the world with the quiet vision that sees beyond the boundaries of normal sight. There are a few on this earth, such as she, who seem to see the "unseen things above" and whose lives take on the notes of peace and serenity for which all of us long. Because they inspire the ones around them to reach out in beautifully human ways, the world is made a holier place by the presence of such people. Sometimes we call them saints. Manny was not a saint and would have been the first to deplore such a title. She was a most human woman with her own areas of fragility and weakness; but she was also one of the kindest and most loving persons who ever lived in my world. She was a predominant influence in teaching me to be extraordinarily sensitive and non-condemning in my reactions to things around me, and every memory I have of her today

is sustaining and regenerative.

Memory creates a bridge between two worlds, the world of was and the world of is, and thus helps us achieve a harmony and balance between our spiritual and emotional lives. I can see now as a child I lived more in a world of my own rather than in the world around me because I felt acutely peculiar, unlike everyone else. I have a feeling today that this sense of peculiarity or isolation is a little of what everybody experiences at some time or another, but thank God for those who love us enough to draw us out of our apartness, who set us on a course that helps us find our freedom.

Thus memory also becomes a bridge towards determining our future. I am because I was, and I will be because I am. I take all of it with me -- the good and the bad -- except I always have the option to rename it. I am learning to call it all good, not good by any standard except my own, good because it is forever mine, and good because I have the power to do with it what I will. I am like the blind man who was healed of lack of sight by Jesus, who could not make an adequate analysis of what had happened to him, but could only declare, "Once I was blind, but now I see." That's a little of what this journey is about -- the gift of new sight.

CHAPTER III

THE FALL

I have spent twenty-one years of my life as a student in some educational insitution and six additional years as a teacher. The most traumatic day of my scholastic career was the first day when I made my way out of the shelter of innocence and ignorance into the first grade. Rollo May, a brilliant psychoanalyst and popular author, suggests that the story of Adam and Eve and their fall from the Garden of Eden is really a primitive description of what happens to every human being sometime between the ages of one and three, namely, the emergence of self-awareness, the loss of innocence, and the rudimentary beginning of ethical sensitivity.[1] If that be so, then the first grade marks the final banishment from the garden, and, though it is ultimately what Hegel called a "fall upward," its beginnings produce in us great anxiety. Anything that challenges and evaluates us will always be an anxiety-producing experience until we have learned the courage that comes from knowing and respecting our inner selves and thus know what steps to take to meet the challenges.

My first grade teacher was named Etta Wright. She had taught

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[1]Rollo May, Man's Search for Himself (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1953), p. 182.

school in Arco so long that she had even taught my mother in the first grade; so you can realize that by the time I got to her she was pretty old. Mrs. Wright was a kind old lady with corkscrew curls who squinted at us behind horn-rimmed glasses and gushed, "Boys and girls, we're going to have lots of fun together. We're going to learn to read and write. Won't that be fun?"

There was not a single response from that grave little audience who waited warily for Mrs. Wright to turn into a witch. We had all lived in such dread of that first day of school that now that it was there, we were practically insensate. However, Mrs. Wright did not turn into a witch. She was sweet and kind to us all year. There is just one thing for which I will never forgive her: she didn't tell us where the bathrooms were.

Midmorning I was feeling slightly uncomfortable, and by noon I was nearly drowning. She marched us down to the lunchroom and then out in the school yard to play "Run, Sheepie, Run." I determined to look for the restroom when we got inside, but the pressure was too great to be ignored. In a burst of wild exertion, while running across the yard as a sheepie, I involuntarily released the dam with the result that the nitrogenous and saline materials secreted by the kidneys and stored in the bladder were voided through the urethra, which is a polite way of saying I wet my pants.

Mrs. Wright came up to me as we started into the schoolhouse and said in a low tone, "Do you need to use the bathroom?"

I could only answer what she obviously knew, "Not now."

I dreaded the second day almost as much as the first because I was afraid of a repeat performance, but screwing my courage to the sticking point, I asked Robert Thurston where the bathroom was. Fortunately, Robert knew, and the problem was solved. The humiliation of that first day, however, has never been forgotten. It's a wonder I didn't become a first grade drop-out. I am still angry as I consider the error in an approach to education that thinks learning deals only with a person's mind and omits both the biological functions of the body and the infinite dimensions of the spirit. We are bodies, minds, and spirits. The mind can only absorb what the body will allow, and both mind and body can only use what the spirit will accept.

Years later when I was the schoolteacher, a little girl came up to my desk to ask a question, but I was busy helping another student, and her question did not get asked. Instead, Virginia stood there and quietly created a puddle by my desk. Remembering my own early misfortune, I dismissed the class for an early recess, and when all of the students were out of the room, I wiped up the offending little pool. When the children returned, Virginia's quick glance towards the floor beside my desk and her subsequent expression of relief told me far more eloquently than words that she was grateful that there was to be no discussion or reprisal. Personally, I would rather have had the other students think I had made the puddle than add to that little girl's sense of shame, which she would have to carry and try to process for

the rest of her life.

I've always had a grudging admiration for Norman who jumped up one day in my class and ran out the door post-haste without so much as a word. He was gone a full twenty minutes, and, when he came back, I felt some explanation was due; so I asked, "Where have you been, Norman?"

To which Norman calmly and without a trace of embarrassment answered, "I had to do Number Two. That takes longer than Number One." Oh, to be so free!

We are all involved in a struggle to be, and that is more than just a struggle against biological finiteness, which I might seem to be suggesting here. It is more a struggle to attain inner freedom and live by one's own integrity. To understand the biological side of our nature is ultimately to transcend it and begin the higher challenge of exploration into our spiritual selves. The lesson in the first grade stands out as singularly difficult, but it is behind me, and out of the anxiety of that experience issued the first glimmerings of the simple virtue of courage. It is this courage which ultimately turns the fall into a climb.

CHAPTER IV

THE TRAP

If there was ever a kid in this world I hated when I was ten years old, it was Clayton Hall. Clayton was an oversized, slouchy kid with a mop of black, stringy hair that was always hanging down over his squinty little eyes. He carried with him that peculiar and offensive aroma of a body that has not been washed ~~very~~ much, if at all, and when Clayton was trying to understand what was going on around him, his mouth hung open as if he hoped to absorb through that opening what obviously could not find its way to the brain. Yes, Clayton was poor, and Clayton was dumb. Those conditions could obviously be forgiven for they came about through no real fault of Clayton. But Clayton was also a bully, and that I could not forgive.

Life had dealt harshly with Clayton, and he retaliated by hurting things that were smaller than he, such as June bugs which he would squash between his grimy palms, flies that he would de-wing and drop down the back of Ada Ruth Hawkins' dress, and one ten year old that he would punish in various ways -- namely me.

For almost a year Clayton was my nemesis. Periodically I went home with a swollen lip, a twisted arm, or an empty lunch pail (as well as an empty stomach) because Clayton had eaten my lunch. I bore it all with outer indifference, but boiling fires of hatred were being steadily

stoked within me by his constant abuse and torment.

One day the mouse roared. Clayton pushed me across the fine line that divides reasoning from instinct. I came into the schoolroom during recess and found him blotting ink all over a penmanship paper I had just finished, ~~to hand in.~~ I, the meticulous and careful little student who wanted only to be left alone to pursue my intellectual interests, felt fury rising within me like bitter gall. With no thought of possible consequences, with nothing but gut-gripping, white-hot anger pressing into every cell and atom of my being, I doubled up my fist and popped Clayton in the nose with all my might.

"God damn you, Clayton, I hate you!" I yelled, all the repressed rage suddenly unleashed.

Blood spurted from Clayton's nose like a geyser, and Clayton did an amazing thing. He let out a yell of pain and mortification and ran from that schoolroom as though he was afraid I would hit him again.

I was too stunned to realize all that had happened in that moment. Then some of the other students came running in from outside with tense, eager faces, asking, "What did you do to Clayton? He's gone home."

I realized I had defeated the foe. I also realized for the first time that bullies are essentially cowards, and Clayton, the coward, never bullied me again. I rode the crest of victory proudly at first, and then, as often happens, the oppressed, when freed, becomes the oppressor. Hungry for conquest, I looked around for new worlds.

Martin was a slender, slightly frail boy who had a perpetually

runny nose. We sometimes rode our horses to school together. Martin like me because, though I was a year older, I treated him as an equal. Too bad for Martin. He was fated to taste the dregs of abuse I had suffered under the regime of Clayton Hall, now deposed.

That night after school, as we walked out to the barn to our horses, I challenged Martin to fight. At first he thought I was joking, so I grabbed him and threw him down in the snow. I doubled up my fist to hit him in the face, and Martin began to cry. His expression was not one of fear -- it was one of betrayal and hurt. To this day I can see Martin's face, and to this day I can remember the sick feeling that suddenly gripped me.

The lessons I learned in that hour have been deeply imprinted in my consciousness. I discovered that in hurting Martin I hurt myself. I also discovered that the price of hating Clayton was to love myself less. Clayton was still the victor over me because the thing I so loathed in him had come to rest in me. I didn't know it just that way when I was ten, but the subsequent years have certainly verified it. How often I have wished I could go back across the years and do just one thing that I never did that day. I wish I had helped Martin get up out of the snow. I wish I had done something to make the helpless, hurt look on his face go away. I wish now I could have had the courage to hug him. But I didn't. I just turned around and walked away, deeply and forever ashamed, but infinitely and forever wiser.

CHAPTER V

AND THE FIRE BURNED MERRILY ON

The dream to be a writer was born in me at an early age, and I launched into my first novel the summer I got out of the fifth grade, when we were between haying seasons and ranchwork was at a momentary lull. I discussed possible plots with my mother, indicating that I couldn't decide between a jungle adventure or a tale of medieval knighthood. She suggested a subject a bit closer to home, like life on an Idaho ranch.

Well, maybe for starters, I thought; but Idaho ranch life seemed dull by comparison.

The first time we went the thirty miles into Arco, I bought two five cent tablets, one for the ranch romance which I would write first, and the other for the jungle adventure which would follow closely on the heels of the eminent and forthcoming success of the western. I had utter confidence that a great talent was about to blaze forth.

Getting started was the hardest part. I couldn't seem to get a toehold; so I borrowed an opener from Zane Grey, currently my favorite author, and began to copy: "A September sun, losing some of its warmth but none of its brilliance, was just beginning to sink behind mauve-tinted hills as a lone rider laboriously directed his horse across the flats of purple sage that reached to the dim horizons." That sentence,

loosely gathered from several places in Zane Grey, seemed to unleash a writing force within me that could not be stopped, and with no concern that I had plagiarized, I began to write furiously.

My story was one of intrigue, cattle rustling, and a kidnapped rancher's daughter. The hero was a wayward cowboy named Tex who is the rider we meet making his laborious way across the purple plains on a winded pinto horse, which I described as "sweating a lot around the fetlocks." Tex is on his way to meet Lois, the rancher's daughter, although he doesn't know that. Neither does Lois, but I do. I have decided that Tex and Lois will meet and fall in love, and that he will save her from a fate worse than death, said fate to be horrible but not yet clearly defined in my mind.

Lois was named after my mother. I figured if Mother was to be my main critic, she should have the honor of having the feminine lead bear her name. I had Lois speak in "low, trilling accents." I had read that somewhere, and it appealed to my imagination.

With the completion of each chapter I read it to my mother. She commended the effort, but I felt she was not deeply absorbed in the plot, because I caught her doing other things while I read, like looking at the clock. Chapter Four found Lois's father, owner of the X Bar X Ranch, dead from a rustler's bullet. Chapter Six found him alive again. I had forgotten I killed him in Chapter Four. Mother reminded me once you kill a character, you need to leave him dead, unless you're doing a story with a religious theme. I had to rewrite Chapter Six, a painful and

thankless task.

I had written steadily for several weeks. I had a callous on my index finger and writer's cramps like you wouldn't believe, had nearly filled my first tablet and whittled away six pencils sharpening them with the butcher knife. Yet for all of that, I was getting nowhere. I had introduced so many characters that I had lost track of them myself, had changed the initial direction of the story at least half a dozen times, and couldn't decide if Lois should marry Tex or get raped by Black Bart. Since I had only a hazy conception of what rape entailed, I finally ruled it out, thus sparing my heroine's virtue.

In a dramatic showdown in Black Bart's hideout cabin, to which Lois had been abducted, Tex and Black Bart shoot it out. The bullets go straight to their mark and both men fall dead, pierced through the heart. Lois, realizing she has nothing to live for, falls into a swoon. (I spelled it s-w-a-i-n.) I was sick to death of the whole mess, and I ended it all with the hero and villain both dead, the heroine in a swain, and this final wrap-up sentence for dramatic punctuation: "And the fire burned merrily on."

I thought I detected a faint twitch at my mother's lips when I read that line, but I couldn't be sure.

I then began to plan the jungle tale around a Tarzan theme, another literary hero, except that I was going to call mine "Loren of the Lions." But my journalistic career had burned itself to an early finish. I tried half-heartedly to revive an interest, but Tex, Lois,

and Black Bart had sapped my creative strength.

I looked at the Zane Grey books that lined the bookshelf in the hallway and wondered how on earth anyone could think of enough words, plots and characters to fill that many pages, to say nothing of the sheer physical stamina required in getting it all down on paper. My teacher had told me Zane Grey was trash, but trash or not, he wrote more books than anyone I'd ever known.

A few years later when we sold the ranch and moved to Arco, my novel surfaced from beneath a stack of "Idaho Farm Journals" that had been piled away in a closet. That jumble of misspelled words and banal expressions was one of the most pitiful attempts at writing I'd ever seen, and as a high school junior I could afford to feel pity for the scrawlings in a five cent tablet that had come from the hand of a success-struck hack writer not yet out of elementary school.

However, the years lend us a gentle perspective and a sense of loving tolerance for what we used to be and do, and somehow we learn to reach back and love ourselves as we were and even appreciate the callow attempts of our primal states. That effort, in spite of its ludicracy, bore some fruit, for years later I made my way into the ministry, a profession that requires the skill of putting words together in some presentable and moderately interesting fashion; and here I am now, at the midpoint of life, writing about a subject close to my heart -- life on an Idaho ranch.

On more than one occasion, I have reflected on that voluntary

exertion of literate powers with a sense of both gratitude and awe. Considering that no one made me do it, considering the rudimentary tools I had at my disposal, and considering the limited scope of my own mind and experience at that time, it was a fairly gigantic effort. After all, not many can claim a novel before they have reached the sixth grade, especially one which deals out misery and death to nearly everyone, but leaves a promise of eschatological hope with a fire that burns merrily on.

CHAPTER VI

BLESS THE BIRDS AND BEASTS

It is largely our environment that teaches us to love or hate. My experiences in a rural environment taught me not only a basic respect for this world which all living creatures must share but also a love for the non-human world whose inhabitants have the same right to life that we humans have.

My closest friends during those early years on the sheep ranch were animals. It began with Bob, an old black and white sheep dog, who spent his summers out in the hills with a sheepherder and a band of sheep. Watching Bob work those sheep was a pure delight as he would drive them into a huddle, start them moving down the slope to a new grazing area, or bring back some foolish wanderer from nibbling itself lost. In the winter Bob stayed at the ranch and luxuriated in idleness until lambing season began. Then when the pens were filled with the plaintive bleats of the little ones finding their way into the world, Bob would whine and pace impatiently in front of the sheep corrals, anxious to get back ~~out~~ to the bars and slopes where he could herd his flock to his heart's content.

Bob had only one other thing he loved as much as herding sheep, and that was riding in the pick-up. It never left the ranch without Bob ~~was~~ sitting on the front seat by the driver, looking for all the

world like a human with an errand of importance to accomplish. If for some reason he was left behind, he was heartbroken and would creep to the gate and wait mournfully for the pick-up's return.

It was by that same gate that Bob learned to wait for me each afternoon at four o'clock, and, when he saw me coming down the road from school, he would explode into a frenzy of yipping, as he ushered me into the corral to put away my horse. Bob was an old dog when I knew him, and he had to be put away one winter because extreme age was making him nearly blind and crippled and unable to do the work he loved, but to the end he remained lovable and loyal.

Every year during lambing season there would be a number of lambs orphaned by the death of the mother sheep, or for some reason rejected by the ewes who gave them birth. These lambs were called "bums," and we brought them up to a pen near the house and raised them on bottles. It was usually my job to feed them, sometimes ten or more at a time. There are few things more adorable than lambs in the way they play and run, and everyone of those little bums became a pet to me. I endowed them with names, and they would run from across the pen to me the moment they saw me appear. I am sure this was because I fed them, enduring with good nature their little bunts against the bottle and their plaintive demands when I pulled the nipples out of their mouths when the milk was gone. All too soon, however, those little orphans grew up and joined the herd as staid and non-distinctive creatures; so I knew it was useless to allow anything other than temporary attachments to them. Still, they formed

a link in my chain of affection for animals.

My transportation to school and back was a horse. Most of the time I rode Diamond, an old sorrel gelding who was at least twenty-five years old and so gentle I could lie flat on his back and take a nap without fear of being jounced off. Diamond was essentially worthless by the time he was given to me to ride to school. He could no longer climb the mountains to track the sheep, and so his last years were lived in peace and quiet in the home pasture, with the only disturbing influence in his life a daily trip to the schoolhouse where he had to wait tied to a hitching rail until school was out.

The only time Diamond showed much ambition was when we started home after a long, boring day, and then he would take off on a stiff-legged lope that would throw even the best rider up in the air. On many a homeward journey he took the bit between his teeth and crow-hopped down the lane as fast as he could go, in spite of my tuggings and stern commands of "Whoa!" He knew there was a manger of fresh hay and a feed-box of oats waiting for him in the barn, and nothing could take precedence over that.

Sometimes I rode Diamond with just a halter instead of a bridle and always bareback because fussing with a saddle was just too much work. Once the halter fell off as we were on our way to school on a particularly nippy morning, and Diamond calmly turned around and trotted the mile back home, in spite of my protests. Mother said she looked out the window and saw me bouncing up and down in the air, slapping Diamond on the neck, and

yelling for all I was worth.

Another time he fell with me while rearing home and threw me over his head into a snowbank. The amazing thing was that he did not keep running, for, once free in the open, Diamond was usually impossible to catch. Instead he came over and nosed me gently and waited for me to drag myself painfully out of the snow with a wrenched knee and then stood quite still while I managed to swing up on his back. The bridle reins had slipped off in the fall, but Diamond started gently down that homeward road without any guiding control from me, and that time he did not run. I think it was his way of saying he was sorry.

A special bond of affection grew between us, and though we had other horses, far more beautiful and much younger, which I rode, Diamond was always my favorite. Perhaps it was because no one else wanted him at that point in his life, and I responded to that with an empathy born out of my own feelings. He was my chief confidante and confessor, and, as far as I know, never betrayed any of the secrets that I shared with him.

There was an old grey cat who lived around the lower barn and kept herself alive hunting field mice. She was wild and would let no one approach her, and I spent hours at the lower barn trying to coax her to let me pet her. In spite of my patient efforts, she would never let me near. I suppose she had never been handled by a human being and was unable to overcome her fear. I named her Igraenaen, after a character in a Greek legend I was currently reading at school,

and called her Aggie for short.

One day when I went down to the lower barn on the way to the river, where I was learning to swim with water wings made out of a flour sack and two gallon cans, I heard a tiny mewing sound, and out from under the corner of the barn toddled a little white kitten. Agamemnon had become a mother! Entranced, I dropped the water wings and picked up the tiny little white ball, and then crouching down and peering under the barn, I saw nearly a dozen more. They didn't all have their eyes opened yet, but they were crawling around in their little nest of straw and squealing with all their might, apparently missing their mother. Then I saw Agamemnon coming through the field. She was so gaunt that her sides were caved in. Knowing that she would not want me to frighten her babies, I put the little wanderer back with his family and carefully backed away.

Back to the house I ran at full speed and talked Mother into a pan of milk for Agamemnon, made even more urgent by my dramatic description of her emaciated condition, and ran back to the barn and placed the milk in front of the hole that led to their home. Then I retreated around the corner. In a few seconds I was rewarded by seeing Aggie creep out cautiously and begin to lap the milk. She seemed nearly starved. I decided it was probably the first good meal she had had since her litter was born. Who wouldn't be starved trying to feed twelve little ones? I experienced a deep emotional satisfaction in feeling I was needed.

Each day thereafter I carried milk to Agamemnon, and each day, if she were not around, I crawled under the barn and cuddled those little kittens. Then one day when I came down with my offering of nourishment, I found the little nest was empty. Panic-stricken, I searched everywhere, and then ran back to the house to tell Mother that something had killed Aggie and her babies. But she told me that mother cats often move their little ones, especially if they are worried about their safety, and suggested that I not try to find them. I think she was worried that eventually I would move them up to the house.

In spite of her suggestion, however, I searched diligently, and after about a week, found them under a stack of lumber near the lambing sheds. Now the kittens had their eyes opened. They were not afraid of me, and I spent nearly every free hour with them. Agamemnon moved them three more times, and each time I found them. I was as determined to be a part of that family as she was determined to keep me out.

All of the kittens were gray except for one white one. The casual observer would have said they were indistinguishable from each other, but to me each of them was distinctive. I named each of them, a conglomorate of literary characters and alley cat appellations. The least elegant were endowed with fancier names, like Helen of Troy, Billy Budd, Charles Dickens, and Aristotle, whereas the more handsome ones received plainer names. I supposed I was trying to make some adjustment for nature's inequities. Out of that little band of twelve emerged my favorite, Pie Face, the little white one with orange markings on his face

that resembled an apricot pie that has run juice through the holes of its crust. Pie Face was always the first to run out to greet me, just as he had been the first to leave his nest on the day I discovered them, and he seemed distinctive and affectionate in ways that his largely nondescript brothers and sisters were not.

Then I made my big mistake. The kittens were now nearly half grown, Agamemnon had become distinterested in remaining as the bread-basket (or milk bottle) for that little army, and deserted all of us for greener pastures somewhere. Worried that they might not have enough to eat, I carried them up and established them in a shed near the house where I could more easily take the fresh milk to them that was left after it had been poured through the separator. It was no time until the cats found the back door leading into the porch where the milk was separated, and each time that door was opened, there stood twelve yowling cats. Nearly everybody who went out that door, except me, cursed those "damn cats."

One morning I went outside and suddenly realized it was absolutely silent around the back door. Anxiously I ran out to the shed and called, and from under a pile of wood ran Pie Face, but I could not locate any of the others.

"I can't find the cats," I announced to Mother. "What do you suppose has happened to them?"

She suggested that sometimes cats leave to find new homes, that they are really happier living out where they can trap mice and run wild.

I looked for them for a long time and finally concluded that they had all left me. Gratefully I fondled Pie Face and thanked him for having enough appreciation for what I had done for him to stay around.

I might never have known what happened if, some months later, I had not heard Harry Mays, the neighbor whose ranch touched ours at the farthest end, remark to my stepfather, "Say, do you know there must be a dozen gray cats living down at that lower hay stack of yours. They look fat, but they're wilder than hell."

I knew then where Pie Face's brothers and sisters had gone. They had not left; they had been taken away. I cherished a resentment and a sense of betrayed trust for a long time against anyone who might have been involved in that act of duplicity, but I never discussed it. It stirred feelings of alienation in me and reinforced the awful notions within me that what I felt or wanted was not really important. I am glad they didn't kill the cats, throwing them in a sack weighed with rocks and tied at the top, as farmers usually did in that region when the cat population got out of control. I am glad, too, that little Pie Face was left. But for a long time I carried an unreasonable hurt that no one had understood that those cats were not just animals to me, they were my friends.

That love and appreciation for the non-human world, nurtured in my childhood years, has never left me. The growing conviction has gradually dawned upon me that everything that lives has something of value to share with us, that there is a kind of divinity within all living

creatures that adds a higher dimension of communication to this grand adventure of life when we are ready for it. Yet I find myself absolutely dumbfounded sometimes to see how professedly Christian men and women reject the doctrine of the sacredness of all life and become oppressors of the non-human world.

In the opening chapters of the Bible, the human race was charged with the responsibility of taking care of this world when Adam was told to name the animals. Naming, in the Biblical sense, meant to endow with spiritual qualities. Through Adam God assigned the human world to be the caretakers of the non-human world, to treat everything as though it had spiritual value and not to mistreat or slaughter needlessly. Personally, I am a bit suspicious of any person's religion if the non-human world does not feel its benefits. The teachings of Jesus tell us that God takes account of the injuries and sufferings of even the tiny sparrow.

Hunting and fishing were popular pastimes where I grew up. The mountain streams and rivers had a liberal supply of trout. The plains were then plentiful with sage hens, pheasants, and antelope. Deer and elk were abundant in the hills. Some of these species are now starting to disappear from that area because they have been fished or hunted out. When I was old enough for a hunting license and had learned how to shoot a rifle, I was allowed to go on the annual fall hunt. Because I was a novice, the other hunters stationed me at the foot of a coulee to wait for any deer that might be flushed out by the hunters climbing up

above.

Sitting on a rock in the early morning sun, I fell into a reverie with my gun lying across my knees and forgot all about hunting deer. Then a noise of falling rocks snapped me to attention. Out of an aspen grove a short distance in front of me ran a young doe. She stopped for a minute, looking behind her wildly. In that moment she presented herself fully to me as a target. Because I had been told to do it, I raised my rifle quietly, drew a bead, and fired without allowing myself to think. She jumped in the air, staggered a few feet, and then crumpled on the ground. I ran over with a wild sense of elation. I had killed my first deer! It was tantamount to becoming a man!

The deer was struggling and pawing in the air with her feet. As I looked into the pain and anguish of those beautiful brown eyes, human-like in their reflected suffering, from which life was slowly ebbing, I was instantly ill with remorse. I knew that at that moment I had become an oppressor of the weak, a destroyer of life.

I threw the gun on the ground and vowed I would never hunt again. I never have, and I never will. To me it is one of the most cruel and inhumane "sports" we allow ourselves. When we lived in Bell Mountain Canyon, my dad killed deer so we would have food on the table. Perhaps hunger and starvation justify killing animals, but killing for the sheer pleasure of killing is not justifiable under any circumstances.

I am not fully a vegetarian, yet the facts about how meat gets on my plate through the cruel process of pain, terror, thirst, crowding,

and suffocation have made me reduce my consumption of meat and even consider abandoning it altogether. The facts about the pain suffered by animals for scientific or military research should be deplored by any caring, sensitive person, and the sport of hunting is just one more way in which humans degrade themselves below the non-human world and thereby abdicate their God-given responsibility. Only humans kill for the utter joy of killing, and we are doing terrible things to ourselves through this practice, to say nothing of what we are doing to the life assigned to our care. I think that we will always suffer human bondage, until we have become a people gentle enough to respect the mystery of this life that we share with all creatures, a people willing to abolish our futile and ferocious oppression of these helpless creatures who have no words.

Several years ago on a game-viewing safari in Africa I saw the animals of that region living in unfettered and protected freedom on huge game preserves. Seeing those magnificent creatures, some of them on the endangered species list, immune from human restrictions and danger, caused me to question seriously the rightness of zoos and circuses. Do we have a right to imprison any creature just so that we can look at it, throw it a peanut now and then, or be amused by its behavior? Is this what God meant when He told Adam to control the world?

My wife and I live today in the Oakland hills overlooking the San Francisco Bay. The area around our home is semi-rural and abounds with wildlife. Sometimes this wildlife has been a bit inconsiderate

when sharing our garden, but we have had the thrill of watching a mother deer bring her twin fawns to our yard each morning where we might see them play. We have experienced delight when raccoons came to our back door and knocked politely for food. We have felt wonder in seeing lizards sit on the rocks of the garden wall, allowing us to stroke their backs. We have enjoyed the little hummingbird that came to the feeder on the patio each time we were there for meals, as though it too wanted companions for dinner. I have had the privilege of getting acquainted with the spider who built her web in the corner of my study window and came out at night when my light was on to work along with me. I have had both education and recreation given to me by the hundreds of birds who have visited the feeder each day by my study window, allowing me close hand observation of their habits and relationships. Most especially, we have had great pleasure in raising three little Maltese dogs whose companionship with us has been one of the special gifts of God. In all of it I have seen the loving hand of a Creator who made us all and put us here together for some purpose of mutual discovery and communication.

In his book, "The Language of Silence," J. Allen Boone speaks directly to me when he says there are no separating barriers between one living thing and another. We are individual parts of every living thing, "expressions in the forever functioning of the inseparable oneness of all life."[1]

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[1]J. Allen Boone, The Language of Silence (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1970), p. 12.

CHAPTER VII

TREASURES FROM DEAD MAN'S CAVE

From the school yard of Little Lost River School, if you looked westward to the mountains, you could see Dead Man's Cave, a black, gaping hole about a fourth of the way up one of the slopes. It was called Dead Man's Cave because, as you might guess, a dead man had been found there, although no one could remember who the man was or when he had died. Legend said he had been a horse thief and had been shot by some irate rancher who had placed his body in the cave; but, if there was anyone living in that valley with more conclusive details than that, he never talked about it.

The bar sloping up to the canyon below the cave was called Dead Man's Flat. It was about a two hour horseback ride across the flat to the mouth of the canyon, and many of us youngsters had ridden at least once to explore that mysterious cavern of rumored foul play.

One day, when spring had fully come to the valley and the earth was warm and green with budding things, when birds were making the air riotous with song, and when the heart of every child refused to be confined by the oppression of a schoolroom, we persuaded the teacher to let us take a picnic excursion to Dead Man's Cave.

The teacher that year was a young lady fresh from the State Normal School at Lewiston, where elementary teachers for Idaho were produced

in two years. Her name was Miss Penny Blossom, and that name arrived in the valley several months before she did. Before she ever made a physical appearance, we had changed her name to half a dozen different corruptions, such as Miss Nickel Flower, Miss Benny Possum, and Walter Waymire's less acceptable Miss Panty Bosom. But when Miss Penny Blossom arrived, all those sobriquets suddenly ceased. Miss Penny was far too delicate, too feminine, too defenseless to have endured such liberties with her name.

Inclined towards stoutness and manifesting a distinct air of eighteenth century propriety, she had a round, Dresden doll face, milk white complexion, large blue eyes, and a frame of pale yellow curls. Neither attractive nor unpretty, she was what you might describe as an adult version of a plump Shirley Temple.

There is one word that sums up for me a description of Miss Penny, and that word is helpless. How she ever lasted a full year in that lonely valley is beyond me! She did it, I guess, simply by being helpless. Rather than living in the teacherage, she chose to room and board at the Byron Hawley Ranch, which had the nicest house in the entire valley, one of the few with an indoor bathroom. Mr. Hawley, or one of his hired men, always drove Miss Penny to school, saw that the fires were built, the wood stacked behind the stove, and the snow cleared from the doorway. She received privileged treatment unlike that afforded any previous teacher, not because she was seductive, likeable, or infirm, but rather because she was utterly and completely helpless.

In the classroom she managed to hold control because to have played tricks on Miss Penny Blossom would have been like mistreating some defenseless infant. She cried easily, had a habit of fluttering her hands, rolling her eyes, and squeaking, "Goodness me!" It was not that we liked her so much as that we pitied her, and not even the wildest boy could have been deliberately mean to Miss Penny.

But we did take advantage of her. We told her farfetched stories of murder and violence in that valley that threw her into regular spells of eye rolling and hand fluttering. We warned her about rattlesnakes ten feet long until she was afraid to go outside to the toilet. (We didn't have indoor plumbing at the school.) We told her that every unmarried lady teacher who had ever come to Little Lost had been carried off by some cowboy, and we made it sound so romantic that the pathetic little thing would squeal, "Goodness me!" with a perfect mixture of dread and anticipation.

But the worst thing we ever did to Miss Penny was to persuade her to dismiss school for a day to have a picnic outing at Dead Man's Cave. Any teacher other than Miss Penny would have balked firmly at such a proposal, but when we promised model behavior and described the advantages such a field trip would provide as a nature study, Miss Penny demurely gave in.

There were ten children in school that year. We all had our own horses for the trip, and Walter Waymire brought one for Miss Penny to ride. But she shrieked and jerked so hard on the reins after we boosted

her on that the poor frightened animal began to prance, and Miss Penny, ludicrous in a pair of Mr. Hawley's bib overalls, nearly fell off. I had to let her ride Diamond, who was gentle enough for any tenderfoot, and I rode the horse Walter had brought.

Miss Penny almost fainted from the heat before we got her across Dead Man's Flat and into the cool shade of the canyon. She had to be helped from her horse by the children and half-carried to a shady spot beside the stream, where she lay inert for nearly half an hour, her face a bright beet red, while Ada Ruth Hawkins and Jessie Jean Mays carried water to her and kept a cool, moist hanky on her plump, little forehead. Finally she was able to sit up to inquire fearfully if there were any snakes nearby and to suggest weakly that we should eat. Most of us had already eaten our lunches during the two hour ride from the schoolhouse, and we wanted to hike up to the cave.

She shuddered as she looked up the slope, and, with two or three "Goodness me's," she finally ventured to say she would stay below and see that nothing frightened the horses. We knew better than to trust her with that responsibility, and we eventually persuaded her to attempt the short climb to the cave by promising her a spectacular view of the entire valley and interesting rock formations in the cave. Thus with much assistance from the bigger students, and after many long rest periods, Miss Penny finally huffed and puffed her way up to Dead Man's Cave.

The cave went back only a few feet, but its ceiling rose above our heads into an unpenetrable darkness. It was cool inside, and we all

sat down. Miss Penny had rallied now and spoke with greater energy and enthusiasm as she oh'd and ah'd over the view, exclaiming, "Goodness me, it's a pretty country after all. Who would have ever believed it?"

Then Miss Penny saw some black mounded heaps along the bottom of the cave floor, and suddenly she became the schoolteacher again. "Why, whatever have we here? Goodness me, this looks like some mineral deposit." She picked up a handful of the stuff and began to examine it carefully.

Walter Waymire and Jake Little had backed away with broad grins, and even Ada Ruth and Jessie Jean had turned away to hide their smiles. The younger children, however, gathered around her in naive interest.

"Gee whillickers," said Bobby Karns, the only first grader, "maybe it's oil. My granddaddy found oil in a cave onct."

"I don't think it's oil," said Miss Penny thoughtfully, "but it certainly is something that should be analyzed. I will not be satisfied unless we take some of it back with us. Children, fill your pockets and lunch pails. We may have made an important discovery."

Walter and Jake had staggered outside and were rolling on the ground, howling hysterically, and Ada Ruth and Jessie Jean had also followed them out to conceal their giggling. Those four were the oldest in the school and certainly more knowing than the rest of us, including Miss Penny.

"We've got to tell her," said Jessie Jean, wiping her eyes.

"Never!" said Walter. "It's too funny to be true."

I had come out of the cave to see what they were doing and heard the conversation. I was only a sixth grader then and not quite in the full center of their confidence, and Walter looked at me and warned, "An' don't you tell her neither."

"What is that stuff?" I asked, and this sent all of them into more gales of laughter.

Just then Miss Penny and the other children joined us. Miss Penny was wiping her hands fastidiously, and her pockets were bulging. "My, that stuff is certainly sticky," she remarked casually. "Well, let's start back."

We arrived back at the schoolhouse a little late, and Mr. Hawley's hired man, Scrub Haight, was waiting to take Miss Penny home. She marched straight up to him and began to remove the black chunks from her pockets.

"Mr. Haight, the children and I found this mineral up in a cave. Do you have any idea what it might be? We brought quite a lot of it with us in case it is valuable, and there are large quantities of it in the cave."

Scrub Haight looked at those dainty, plumpish hands clutching the black nuggets, and he began to choke violently. His face turned red, and he backed away, choking.

"Goodness me," said Miss Penny. "Someone better get Mr. Haight some water."

He waved his hands helplessly, and, when he could finally manage to talk, he said weakly, "Ma'am, I don't think you want that."

"Why not? Do you know what it is? I would like to have some analysis run on the content," Miss Penny answered in a decisive tone.

"Ma'am," stammered Scrub, "that there is bat droppings."

Miss Penny looked totally uncomprehending. "Bat droppings?"

"Yes, ma'am." Then seeing that she did not understand, he continued apologetically, "Ya know, like, er, ah, manure." He pronounced it manore, and, as he said it, he turned away with another coughing spell.

Miss Penny looked down at her hands, and the expression on her face began slowly to change from expectancy to revulsion.

"Dead Man's Cave is full o' bats, ma'am," continued Scrub. "You kids knew that. Ya shoulda tole her," he said to us reprovingly. He turned back to Miss Penny, but Miss Penny was not there. She was moving towards the schoolhouse as rapidly as the baggy overalls would permit, her arms stiff at her sides and both chubby hands shaking frantically in an effort to empty themselves. I caught a glimpse of her face, and it was a faint shade of green. I was afraid she was going to be sick right there in front of all of us.

Little Bobby Karns had opened his lunch pail which was stuffed full of the black substance, and, as Miss Penny disappeared into the schoolhouse, Bobby, utterly frank and wise beyond his years, said with complete disgust, "My God, I got a whole lunch pail full o' bat turds!"

Miss Penny Blossom never mentioned the incident again, and I suspect she has done her best to block it from her memory forever. As for me, I still chuckle when I think of the treasures we brought back

that day from Dead Man's Cave, and how in childish ignorance we made the error of assigning value to something that was utterly worthless. The entire process of life, it seems to me, is geared to teach us what is treasure and what is not. There was no treasure in Dead Man's Cave; but to reflect on that innocent excursion from the land of my childhood has been and will always be a pearl of great delight.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DAY THE SCHOOLHOUSE BURNED DOWN

That cold January day when I turned twelve, I awoke curled into a tight ball under a ton of blankets and decided if there is one thing worse than getting into a cold bed at night it is getting out of it the next morning after you have finally established some spot of warmth. The wool blankets had a rim of icy frost around my face where I had breathed, and, as I turned to look out the windows, I saw they were covered completely with a lacy pattern of ice. The flat iron, wrapped in newspapers, on which I had warmed my feet when I had crawled into bed several hours earlier, was long since cold. It was my birthday, but all that stretched before me was a dreary prospect of fighting freezing temperatures through the morning chores and battling crusted snow drifts on the road to school. For a moment I indulged briefly in the whim that the schoolhouse might burn down, thus releasing me from the cruel necessity of leaving that warm haven of blankets. In typical childlike manner, I viewed the school as a place of imprisonment rather than a place of ultimate liberation. Little did I know that my wish, born in those half-awake moments, was going to come to reality that day.

I arrived at school, my feet numb with cold and my fingers

stiff. I tied Diamond in the barn, and hurrying inside, I was met by a blast of warmth from the pot-bellied stove that stood in the corner. For several minutes I hugged its warmth closely while I slowly began to thaw. My fingers started to ache as the heat got to them, and, knowing that they might be frost-bitten, I got a wash basin from the stand near the door where we kept the water bucket, filled it with cold water, and went back to the fire to soak my hands. When I was somewhat warm, I pulled a chair closer to the stove and began to read, waiting for the teacher and other students to arrive.

I had been in the schoolroom for about ten minutes when something drew my attention overhead to the ceiling where the chimney disappeared into the attic. Through a crack in the ceiling I could see flames shooting into the attic. For several minutes I sat transfixed and gazed stupidly at those flames. Suddenly it hit me that the building was on fire. I jumped to my feet, ran around the stove, and peered upward from the other side. Sure enough, the flames were licking along the edge of the wall and beginning to blacken the wood.

Like a bolt I ran outside and across the short distance to the little house where the teacher lived. Mrs. Harman had replaced Miss Penny Blossom as the teacher of the Lost River School, and I am sure there must have been times, after she discovered that she was not only teacher but janitor, fire-builder, wood-cutter, and snow-shoveler, that she must have wished she had never heard of us. When she opened the door, I stood there, coatless and shivering, and blurted out, "The

schoolhouse is on fire!"

Back over that icy trail we both tore, and when we got inside, the flames had begun to eat down through the cracks of the ceiling so that they were now plainly visible. The fire that had been a welcome friend a few moments earlier when I had first entered from the outside had now become an enemy.

People under duress often do silly things. Mrs. Harman saw the basin of water that I had been using to thaw out my numbed fingers, and, picking it up, threw it full force against the stove. It made a nice sizzling sound but didn't do a thing to curb the inferno raging above. Then she grabbed the bucket of water from the corner and threw it up toward the ceiling. The water came directly back into our faces.

The schoolhouse was made of old timbers that were dry from many summers in a scorching sun and many winters of hot fires in the big stove, and it was burning like tinder. Even I could see that in the ten minutes time since I had discovered it, it was out of control.

"Start carrying things out," Mrs. Harman yelled.

I picked up the first things I saw -- the little chair where I had been sitting earlier, the tin wash basin, and the book I had been reading. I ran outside with these, set them down in the snow, and ran back in.

Mrs. Harman was running in circles around that room, looking up at the fire, and wringing her hands. "Go get help," she screamed. "Ride over and get Mr. Mays." He was the chairman of the school board and

lived a good two miles away. Ordinarily I would have protested the foolishness of such an order, but I was galvanized into action by the menace of those crackling fingers of fire, and without even stopping for a coat, ran out to the barn, dragged poor old Diamond out, and loped off down the road.

Diamond thought he was going home, and we flew along until we came to the fork in the road that turns to the Mays ranch. When I tried to turn him in that direction, Diamond did something he had never done before -- he bucked me off. I landed on a rock and cut a gash in my leg, but in two seconds flat I was up from that humiliating posture, using some language I hadn't learned from Mrs. Harman, and grabbed the bridle reins before Diamond decided to go home without me.

Just then down the road came Mr. Mays in his pick-up. He had seen the flames from his house, for now the entire roof of the schoolhouse was ablaze, and smoke was billowing in great clouds that could be seen for miles. Mr. Mays rattled past me with hardly a glance. So did the Hawkins sisters riding double on an old swaybacked roan, which they were both kicking vigorously while pointing ahead to the school. By the time I remounted Diamond and managed to convince him we were going to school and not home, cars and pick-ups were coming from all directions.

When I arrived back at the schoolhouse, nearly frozen and with a shoe full of blood from the cut on my leg, the school had nearly burned itself to the ground. As I, the unsung hero of the entire drama, rode silently into the yard, Walter Waymire saw me and yelled, "Too bad you're

late. You missed all the excitement!" I could have cheerfully cuffed him.

The loss was total. The only things saved from that fire were the grade book Mrs. Harman had grabbed at the last minute and the three items I had carried out -- a little wooden chair without a back, a tin wash basin, and a book from the Hardy Boy Series, "The Secret Warning."

We missed exactly three days of school. I can personally vouch for the fact that the burning of a schoolhouse does not necessarily stop the educative process. The Board moved the teacher out of the teacherage and they moved the students in. We picked up from where we had left off with books and old desks borrowed from other schools in the district. Though it didn't alter the pattern of life drastically, that fire was one of the most vivid experiences up to that point in my life, and in dream after dream for the next several months that schoolhouse kept right on burning down.

I told this story in a sermon once to illustrate three points: 1) We take with us into our time of testing only those resources we have claimed prior to that moment; 2) Essential things are never really destroyed (a building is not an essential for learning); 3) All things work together for good, for out of that fire eventually came the decision to build a modern, centrally-located school in that valley that consolidated all the one-room schools in that area. I thought it was a fair sermon, but a woman who heard it on the radio called and told me I had it all wrong. She was a psychic, she said, and was able to interpret

life in symbols. The symbols in this instance were the three things I saved from that fire -- a chair, a basin, and a book, the last things I had used prior to the fire. These objects represented the three basic essentials of life -- rest, cleansing, and learning. I thought it was an interesting theory, but I'm not sure it's true. I simply grabbed the first things I could lay my hands on.

That fire hastened changes destined for that valley. Soon the five one-room schools, strung up and down the Little Lost River, closed their doors forever on the completion of a big, beautiful new building at Howe. Students no longer rode horseback to school but instead they were driven in a comfortable, heated bus. The gravel road that wound snake-like from ranch to ranch was replaced with a paved two-lane highway that cut straight through the heart of the valley. The telephone company brought the line over the hills from Arco, and for the first time people in Little Lost had telephones.

I was gone when all those changes were completed, and I certainly conduct no requiem of longing for the days that used to be. But I have lived long enough to know that to better off is not necessarily to be better and that the quality of life is not determined by modern conveniences. Personally, I've always been glad that I came along in time to sample some of the old ways. It gives me a greater appreciation for the new, and also, it allows me to indulge in a little nostalgia now and then by starting off, "Now when I was a kid..."

CHAPTER IX

TAKE UP YOUR FAILURES AND WALK

I graduated from the eighth grade in Little Lost River Valley when I was twelve years old and started to high school in Arco in the fall of 1943. I arrived in high school two years too early because I had started in the first grade when I was five, and, when I reached the seventh grade, the teacher decided I might as well take two grades in one year since I was moderately bright and the only one in my class. This meant when I was sixteen I found myself a Freshman in college. As a result, I always felt somewhat socially deficient through those years because I was several years younger than my classmates.

I was painfully shy when I came from the ranch into Arco to high school. I was afraid to approach people and overwhelmed with such a sense of inferiority and shyness that even to speak my name in class was a supreme effort. More scholastic than athletic, I found the world of books a safe and familiar retreat as over and against the athletic arena where survival called for competitive and aggressive methods. In a town where high school athletics was the raison d'etre, or be-all, for the majority of the local population, I opted out for the seclusion and privacy that had become customary for me and where I felt safest. I studied hard and kept pretty much to myself.

Miss Agnes Noble had taught high school English in Arco as long

as anyone could remember. She was quiet but firm in manner, one of the nearest things to culture that Arco had, and absolutely dedicated to the task of doing away with dangling participles and split infinitives. She brooked no nonsense in her classes, and more than one big hulking boy she had escorted out by the ear for some infraction of behavior. Yet she was respected and admired by every student that ever sat in her classes, and that included most of the Lost River populace. Miss Noble was that proverbial institution of education that develops within a single person who gives the totality of life towards making the doors of learning open for others, and I owe a debt to her that I can never adequately repay. When a shadowing sense of shyness and a lack of self-esteem threatened to cripple me, Miss Noble taught me to walk again, and not only to walk but to stand tall while doing so.

Midway through my Sophomore year she announced to all her English classes that each student would write and deliver a speech in class on the subject, "What the United States Constitution Means to Me." The four best speeches would be selected from each class and submitted as entries in the American Legion Oratorical Contest. We were in the middle of World War II and patriotism was high, but it was easy to see that her announcement would not have won any cheers, even though there were no audible groans. One didn't protest Miss Noble's decisions.

Then she asked to see me after class. Perhaps, after three decades of vain attempts to spark a literate appreciation among the lanky cowboy Lotharios and their gum-chewing consorts, she saw in me

some imprisoned luster that needed polishing. At any rate, she laid it on the line to me that day that she expected a top-notch speech from me, and, just to make sure, she wanted me to write it under the supervision of the local newspaper editor, C. A. Bottolfsen, who, as a former governor of Idaho, was Arco's highest claim to fame and the nearest thing approximating an orator that we had.

Perhaps she asked Mr. Bottolfsen to encourage me as best he could, or maybe he too saw some unreleased value in me. Anyway, he gave me hours of time and encouragement as I wrote and rewrote the speech. Then he set me to memorizing it and practicing it in front of him. He wrote in gestures, pauses, shifts of nuance and inflections of tone, and insisted I try them exactly as he outlined. At last, after several weeks of grooming, he sent me back to Miss Noble with what must have been somewhat relieved instructions, "He's yours to take the rest of the way."

She picked up where he had left off with the same no-nonsense manner in which she conducted her classes, and I was too pliant to think of resisting. By the time they had finished with me, I could have given that speech in the middle of an earthquake or four-alarm fire and never missed a turn or a syllable.

Need I tell you that I was the winner in the Sophomore class? Need I tell you that I defeated the other candidates in the high school and went on to win second place at the district level? You may have already guessed that I probably would not have written this chapter if I had lost. No, I did not make it to the national contest. I wasn't

that good, and besides, I didn't really need that much fame. What I needed was to know that I could do something well, that I could excel in the use of some talent, and that I didn't need to stumble any longer over the pronunciation of my own name. After all, had I not pranced across a stage in front of an auditorium crowded with unknown faces to declaim with pear-shaped tones that could be heard in the back rows what the United States Constitution meant to me? One doesn't need a lot of victories, but everyone needs a few just to keep going.

When the judges' decision was announced that I was the winner, I looked over at Miss Noble and saw tears of pride shining in her eyes for me. That was worth more than winning.

As a matter of further interest, one of the judges at the local contest was the Reverend Gerald Dryden of the Baptist Church, the man who one year later was to baptize me into the church, and who said to his wife after he heard me speak, "Too bad that boy is probably a Mormon; he could make a walloping good preacher." A prophecy? Two years later when I was selected to give the salutatorian's address at the high school commencement, I saw tears of pride in his eyes.

In 1954 when I graduated from college, I was chosen class orator and that time it was my mother who cried. In 1960 when I graduated from the Berkeley Baptist Divinity School and delivered my senior sermon, I saw tears again, this time in the eyes of Ada Grace Cralle, the speech teacher who labored for many years through the struggles of budding and not-so-budding preachers. I hold all those tears in a

special legacy of trust today, for it was the caring and faith of those dear people that sent me on to try to be a "walloping good preacher," or at least a walloping good something. Thank God for all the voices in my lifetime whose faith in me has encouraged me to climb out of the pit of my inadequacy of inferiority. That pit is one of my own self-deception, and its power over me is steadily diminishing.

We need a few people to believe in us if we're going to make it. We simply cannot achieve the worthwhile things all alone, and the cause of most human failures may be the lack of anyone caring and believing. I do believe that God is holding our lives at all times, and I don't think anyone wants us to win more than God does. One of the ways He helps us win is by sending people into our lives who also want this for us. I also believe that every incident in the fabric of our lives is capable of resplendent beauty and transforming glory. If the pattern looks a little shabby or a bit dull, it is only because we can't see the whole. It doesn't mean we have to be winners in every contest, but it does mean we have to feel some sense of pride about who we are and what we do.

That's a little of what it means for me to have my sins forgiven -- to have the faith and love of others tell me that I'm worthwhile.

CHAPTER X

A WINTER NAME FOR GOD

"Step right up, folks, and get your salvation while you can. It's free for the taking. All you've got to do is walk down this aisle and receive it."

I was fifteen years old, in the season of life when spiritual growth lies dormant, and sitting in the Baptist Church in Arco with about thirty other people listening to the evangelist that had been imported for a series of revival meetings. I can recall clearly the events that motivated my being there that evening.

Earlier in the afternoon the evangelist had been brought to the school to speak to an assembly of our little student body of seventy. Most of the students were already firmly ensconsed in the Mormon Church; so I suppose it was principally for the benefit of the non-religious errants that the Reverend Mr. Dryden had persuaded the principal to allow the gathering. The evangelist was both erudite and convincing as he labored over the point that God wanted to have our lives before the devil got us permanently. I was curious and decided to go that night to hear him speak at the church. I believe now I must have felt religiously deficient at that point in my life, because I had no church and no clearly defined view of God.

But more than a high school assembly directed my steps to the

Baptist Church that winter night. For lack of a better description, I suppose it was the strong religious instinct which had always seemed to dwell within me. With almost no early exposure to any kind of formal religion, I nevertheless had presented to me clear moral examples by my grandmother and mother. My grandmother introduced me to various concepts of her own faith, which were a remarkable blend of doctrinal liberalism and pietistic devotion. She read to me from the Bible occasionally, and once, having finished reading the Creation account from Genesis, she looked at me with a twinkle in her eye and said, "I wouldn't advise taking that too literally." I knew that this did not mean that I should not take it seriously and reverently, for I could tell that she did.

As a child I learned to pray, not because anyone ever sat down to teach me, but because I knew that the two persons I loved most -- my mother and my grandmother -- knew how to pray. I am sure their prayers were often forged out of their needs and loneliness, just as mine were. In the beginning of my God-quest, my prayers were typically childish and ego-centered. I used God for what I could get. When dreams of my mother's death would frighten me with the thought that the one person who cared most for me might someday be taken away, I would pray, "God, don't let Mother die." When I had to gather the eggs or bring in the cows, I prayed that the hens would not be on the nests and that the cows would not be across the river. My religion was practical and selfish; yet, in spite of its inadequacies, it gave me a foundation strong enough to hold the spiritual structures that later I was to build.

As I noted earlier, my father was a Mormon. My great-grandfather Romney was part of that intrepid band of pioneers that came to Salt Lake City under the leadership of Brigham Young, and more interesting than that was the fact that he was a polygamist with the dubious honor of having thirteen wives. On the few occasions that Dad took us to visit his people in Utah, I got the distinct feeling that they thought my brothers and I ought to be Mormons too. I went to the Mormon Church in Arco occasionally, not because I liked the religion but because I enjoyed the dances and social activities. Besides, in a community that was predominantly Mormon the best looking girls were in the Mormon Church. Since no one important in my life at that time ever suggested I join, I never did. How different life would have been for me if I had.

My grandmother had grown up as an Episcopalian. Her description of the liturgy and ritual of the Episcopal Church appealed to me, and I would like to have gone to her church if there had been one in Arco. The pageantry of the Roman Catholic Mass also caught my fancy, but likewise there was no Catholic Church. Perhaps it is just as well that my choices were limited, for I think in those days I had the propensity to be a spiritual scavenger of some sort, sampling so many pies that none of them would have been properly digested. Since, other than the Mormons, there were only the Baptists, my religious seeking finally directed me there.

A few things that the evangelist said that night have remained with me to this day. He preached for an hour against such evils as

dancing, drinking, smoking, and going to movies, elaborating on these and other routes one could take to hell. He assured us, without equivocation, that if we walked out the door of the church without giving our lives to Jesus Christ, whose blood had the power to cleanse us from our sins, we were taking a step in the direction of hell. I didn't understand what he meant; moreover, I was beginning to get uncomfortable. I began to suspect that something was going to be done right then and there to help people find salvation if they didn't have it. I was also reasonably sure that everyone in the church knew that I was probably the only one there who didn't have this salvation being talked about, and that they would be expecting me to get it. I began wishing I hadn't come.

Then they started singing the hymn, "Just As I Am, Without One Plea," and between each stanza the evangelist would stop and make his plea for us to come forward so that we would not be lost forever. I was perspiring, and my stomach was churning. I vowed in fervent silence that they would never get down to the front of that church, and, when the service was over, I would never come back.

Finally the hymn was finished, and relief washed over me. But the evangelist held up his hand and said, "Friends, I know there is someone here tonight who needs to make his peace with Jesus. I can't bear to quit until that soul has surrendered. We're going to sing this hymn again, and won't you come, whoever you are, and take Him into your heart and let Him make you a new creature?"

"He means me," I thought with a sinking feeling. "I just don't

see how I can hold out through five more stanzas."

Then as the hymn began again in almost wailing fashion, the thought suddenly flashed, "Why hold out? You could go up there and get whatever it is you don't have." As the thought came, so came the decision. Without waiting for the inner argument to commence again, I put down the hymn book and stepped into the aisle. I had never felt so alone as I did at that moment. I think I would have done anything to remove the awful feeling of estrangement and separation. As I took that first step, an indescribable emotion of joy and peace swept over me. I momentarily seemed to lose contact with those people; they were no longer in the room with me. The burdens of loneliness and responsibility had vanished. I was not actually conscious of propelling myself in any direction, yet I walked to the front of the church. It was not until the evangelist took my hand and said, "God bless you, son; you'll never regret what you've done tonight," that I came back to an awareness of my surroundings. Then, for some reason, I found myself weeping quietly with a great sense of relief.

They took me into a little room, read the scriptures to me, especially Paul's warning in Romans that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, and then insisted that I should kneel down and pray. I guess they wanted to be sure that I had it -- this salvation that was there for everybody to take. By the time they got through with me I was tired and a little apprehensive about what it all meant. The glow of the first moment was fading. The minister talked to me about baptism.

People came up and hugged me and wept. One woman said she knew how happy my family would be.

When I got home that night my mother was sitting in the living room reading. I walked in and announced as calmly as I could, "Well, I got saved tonight." After all, they told me that's what had happened.

She looked up with an expression both curious and wary, but her only words were, "The Baptist religion is awfully narrow. Are you sure you can live up to it?"

How could I know what I can do until I have to? Or how could I know what I would want to do several years after the time of making a decision? It is not possible. I only knew at that moment that something important seemed to have been lacking in my life, that I hoped that I had found it, or at least had started to find it.

I have long since departed from the method and much of the theology which brought me into the Christian church that night, but I have never departed from the spirit of joy that seemed to reach into my life with such power, nor from the spirit of love that seemed to reach out to me from the people in that little church. Something of the loneliness and disorientation of my life began to pass with that experience.

I can look back now and offer many criticisms of that little Baptist Church in Arco. It was fundamental and conservative, and many of the religious notions foisted on me then I later had to release. There was a preoccupied emphasis upon one's personal salvation, almost to the exclusion of any social concern. It seemed difficult for those people

even to get along with each other, and almost nothing good was ever said about another denomination or religious way. God was presented more as a stern judge than a loving Father, a judge who disciplined harshly those who transgressed His Way. Great stress was laid upon the atonement and sacrifical death of Jesus Christ and little upon His ethic of love as a practical routine of life. Right living seemed to be a matter of observing a whole series of "don'ts" to the exclusion of many "do's." Negatives were favored above positives.

But the debt I owe to that church and its people is immeasurable, for they showed me something of the transforming power of life in the community of faith. They taught me to call God my Father and to call myself His child. Most of all, they loved me and began to instill in me an abiding sense of my own worth. I will live a long time before anything more important than those things will happen to me. In spite of the preacher's promise that night, however, I didn't get everything I needed by walking down that aisle. I simply took the first step on a journey toward God-realization, a journey which I have discovered is synonomous with self-realization and realization of others.

Twelve years after that first step I found myself in seminary studying to be a minister. In my senior year I was required to write a doctrine of God. By that time I had studied the philosophical and theological systems fairly well, and I felt competent to develop a God doctrine using all the orthodox terms. Yet I did not necessarily feel any closer to God because I was able to write in abstract, theological

terms about God. I have more recently decided that to write of God, or think of God, purely in this way is like studying a timetable of some transportation system, such as the bus or train. We will get some idea of what the trip would be in terms of schedule and logistics, but not until we actually take the trip can we understand the trip in terms of its own essence. The timetable is both helpful and necessary, but it does not show us the green valleys, rolling hills, and villages that might lie between us and our destination. That we only get by taking the trip. So we may get a cursory and intellectual knowledge of God by studying and developing our theological systems, and I do not mean to deplore that process; but only as we seek some understanding of the signs and manifestations of God in our own daily life-events and cultivate some experiential relationship with God do we begin to have any knowledge of what God is or what we should call Him.

In my earliest stages I was like Abraham in the Old Testament who spoke of God as Friend. After my conversion experience at fifteen, and, as I took up life in the Christian community, I learned to call God my Father, as Jesus taught, and for years I believed that this was the most profound concept that we could have concerning God. Then came the women's liberation movement that infiltrated all our social insitutions, including the church, and challenged speaking of God as a male parent. Some ardent reformers then began addressing God as Mother, while the more moderate liberationists pushed for Father-Mother, a term which Mary Baker

Eddy, founder of Christian Science, had found satisfying. There is, I think, some value in the term Father-Mother, for it takes on special qualities that Father or Mother alone do not have. But the real value of this religious language reform was to help us understand God is neither Father nor Mother in the highest sense, that God is not a person in any sense of the word, and that perhaps as we are forced to throw out all of our own ideas as to what God is, God will reveal Itself in such a way that there will never again be a question in our minds as to what God is or what name to use.

To some people God is best understood when referred to as Mind. Others can only visualize God as Principle, or as the Law of the Universe. I once heard a humanist describe God metaphorically as Creative Interchange. Those who love nature have a sense of God as Life, the gentle Life which is in all things. Still others are satisfied in understanding God as Christ, while many find meaning in Paul Tillich's term, "Ground of Being." Personally, I like all of these terms as long as I don't have to like any one of them exclusively. What we call God is but a reflection of our own state of consciousness. My present state of consciousness finds satisfaction in thinking of God as Immanent Essence of Infinite Life and Power, that which is back of all that I am, that which has animated all that I have done, and that which ever manifests Itself in and through all I will yet do or be. But my strongest sense of God is not in a definition but in what I feel. Those first few moments in the church aisle when I was fifteen were moments of feeling God rather

than moments of defining God. I am hard-pressed to intellectualize that experience, but I have no difficulty recalling how I felt.

I am trying, therefore, to say that God is more what I feel than what I think. My feeling leads me to accept the definition of God as the Immanent Essence of Infinite Life, Love, and Power that is back of everything and the source of everything. Since our lives must come directly from this Infinite Life, we are identical in quality to It as a drop of water taken from the ocean is identical to the ocean. But just as the ocean transcends the life of a single drop of its water, so must God transcend the life of any one of His children. We differ from God in degree but not in essence, which is what "being made in His own image" means to me. The degree that we then open ourselves to God is the degree by which we take on more of the nature and powers of God. A belief in other powers and a worship of other gods limit us from the full Life of God, a limitation that we ourselves set. To be open to God is to be open to the fullness of one's self, which means that when one begins to understand one's own lifestory, the way is opened for an understanding of the story of Infinite Life.

Paulo Freire, in his book, "Pedagogy of the Oppressed," writes of the need to name our world that we might change it. He suggests this can only be done by dialogical encounter between persons in the climate of profound love. To name something, he says, is to transform it; however, once named, it may require a new naming, since creation is a continuous act. Therefore, Freire concludes that no name is ever final,

nor can one name on behalf of another person if the process is to be a truly liberating one.[1]

To name God, as I have been attempting to do, is to name God's world and to enter into a creative process with God in the transformation of His world. I cannot give a name to God on behalf of another, however, for by this very act I seek to dominate another. Love is the foundation of God, and domination is opposed to love. Thus, any name that my life experiences may have taught me to give to God can never be forced upon another, for as quickly as I do this I become a dominating force rather than a liberating one. Real love is liberating, and the best way that I can participate in God's liberating process is for me to enter into dialogue with all that God has created. This puts me into a common task with others in the act of learning how to name God and how to name God's world, and it puts me into a relationship of love with everyone and everything that shares this world with me.

Nikos Kazantzakis, the Greek poet, once wrote, "A name is a prison, God is free." While it is true we cannot imprison God by any name, our struggle to transcend our finiteness fails if we do not at least try to name God. I hold that God is only named as we learn to name ourselves and to name each other in a climate of profound love, and this is precisely what I think Jesus Christ helps us do. It is this cooperative process that becomes the reality rather than some transformed, static

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[1]Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (New York: The Seabury Press, 1970), pp. 76-79.

state of being. I cannot underscore too heavily this final point, for I think it is not until we have entered into such a climate of cooperation and mutual trust with each other, a kind of partnership, that we will ever know anything about freedom. And only when we know and experience freedom, both for ourselves and others, can we give God the name that is rightly deserved.

I look back across the sweep of years -- the prayers formed out of my selfish interests along the banks of the Little Lost River, the struggles of self-surrender and victory at the altar of a little lava rock church in Arco, Idaho, and all the subsequent experiences touched and influenced by those dawning moments of trying to find a name for God -- and I am grateful for all of it. I am not grateful because I have arrived at the place where I know God's full name, but I am grateful that I have started.

CHAPTER XI

THE ENCYCLOPEDIA SALESLADY

Every now and then some salesman would find his way across the lava beds or sage flats into Arco, and though I doubt he ever sold very much of anything, his coming was heralded as a welcome intrusion into the monotony that often characterizes small towns. On special occasions we would even be visited by salesladies. I remember well the day the encyclopedia saleslady came.

I met Johnny Beale that particular afternoon in front of the drug store. He had a carton of ice cream under his arm. "Whyncha c'mon over," he invited, "Funny ol' woman's tryin' to sell us some books."

I needed no second invitation. Something in his voice piqued my curiosity. I could hardly keep up with Johnny as we hurried up the street, cut across the vacant lot, and puffed our way up the hill to the tiny, unpainted house where Johnny lived.

The saleslady was in the bare front room, and spread out on the table and the day bed where Johnny slept was an array of big blue books. The room was like an oven and nearly full of people, which included Johnny's mother, his sister and younger brothers, his Aunt Addie, Jerry Bircham whose husband worked with Johnny's dad on the road crew, and the three Bircham kids. Johnny's mother looked worried, a little frown

of annoyance etched across her face. But then Johnny's mother looked that way most of the time.

"You'll just have to wait until my husband gets here," she was saying, "but I just don't see how..."

"Ya never seen books like this, didja boy?" said a voice, deep and strong like a man's, and I found myself being addressed by one of the oddest looking creatures I had ever seen. "Just look at 'em, boy. Feel the quality of that paper. Look at the color spread o' the human body. Betcha never knew how a person's body looked on the inside, didja?"

I didn't, but I could hardly concentrate on that when I had never seen a person's body look like hers did on the outside. She was shaped like a mammoth doughnut that had been stuffed into a wrinkled black pin-stripe suit. Her ankles were bigger than Emma Jepson's ankles and fell down in big lumpy rolls over the tops of her dusty, run-over oxfords. Emma was supposed to have dropsy and everyone said this made her ankles swell, but this woman had her beat. She had removed her jacket and rolled up the sleeves of a wrinkled white waist, revealing swollen forearms that made mine look like matchsticks. Sweat poured down from under grimy sleeves through the fine little hairs that sprinkled her arms, and sweat stood out in beads and miniature rivulets all across the splotchy red wattles of her neck. Her cheeks, puffed out like two purple apples, were underlined by the shadow of a heavy black moustache that also glistened with perspiration. A few wisps of gray hair stuck

out at odd angles from under an old black felt hat. I had never seen a creature quite like her, and I stood there absolutely fascinated, yet repelled by some indefinable loathing towards this gargantuan lump of moist, bloated flesh.

She handed me one of the volumes. "Take a look at it, boy," she barked, "and don't tell me ya have books like that over atcher school."

I had no intention of telling this woman anything at all, especially if it might be disputatious. I took the big tome gingerly and sat down and began to turn the pages. "It's very nice," I finally managed to say, looking dutifully at the list of contributors that went on to page xliii.

"Git on over into the book, boy," she growled. "Pertend yer teacher wants ya t' write a paper on a subject and ya need some information. Look up yer subject in the book and see what it tells ya."

She leaned across me, licking her thumb quickly to flip the pages, and as I caught the heavy smell of perspiring flesh that has been folded too closely together for too long a time, I cringed back.

Johnny's mother came in then with a dish of the ice cream Johnny had brought home and handed it to the lady who sat back in her chair and began to devour it greedily. I kept turning the pages of the book ~~but~~ while covertly watching the woman.

"I just don't think we're interested," Mrs. Beale began again nervously, but the woman waved her spoon as if she hadn't heard and said

to Clara Sue, Johnny's sister, "Honey, could ya get me a nice big drink o' cold water?" Then turning to Mrs. Beale, she said briskly, "Let me ask ya somethin', ma'am. Are ya int'rested in givin' yer kids the best ya can?"

"Certainly, but..."

"Then ya can't afford not t' have these books, ma'am. They're absolutely one o' the finest sets anywhere fer the money. Ya say yer husband will be home in an hour? Let's wait and talk t' him about it. He ought t' have the chance t' make an investment in the future education o' yer kids."

I stood up. "I have to go," I announced, remembering the pound of hamburger I had been on my way to buy. No one even looked in my direction. "Wanna go to the show later, Johnny?" Johnny nodded, not looking up from his study of the color plates of the human anatomy spread out before him in the encyclopedia.

After dinner I dropped back at the Beale house. One of the Bircham kids was playing toy cars in a labyrinth of dusty roads, which he had created in the front yard, and announced, as I started to climb the rickety stairs, "She's still in there."

Inside the scene was much the same as it had been a few hours earlier, with the addition of Johnny's dad and Sy Bircham from next door. Johnny was over in a corner reading a comic book, by this time plainly bored with the encyclopedia saleslady. The table carried the remnants of a hastily-contrived meal, which I gathered the woman had shared because

she was picking her teeth with obvious satisfaction. The odor of fried onions was powerful in the room, but it was cooler now and the perspiration no longer stood out in shining droplets on her mottled flesh. The red splotches had faded a little, and she still wore her hat.

Johnny's dad was looking at one of the books. He was a slow man, both in speech and action, a slowness bordering on stupidity, many thought. "It's sure a nice set o' books," he said thoughtfully.

"Yere absolutely right, Mr. Beale. It's one o' the finest sets ya'll ever see anywhere." She removed the toothpick. "Tell me, Mr. Beale, where would ya like t' travel in this world if ya had the chance?"

Johnny's dad thought a brief moment and then replied, "Alaska." He'd had a cousin once who had gone to Alaska and had sent back a postcard. Johnny's dad carried that postcard with him for weeks until it was dogeared and tattered, showing it to anyone he could.

"Good," said the woman. "Now, let me show ya how ya could go t' Alaska right here in yer own livin' room, just by havin' these books." She licked her thumb and began to flick pages.

"Let's go to the show," said Johnny to me, abruptly standing up.

We walked down the one street of Arco to the Walker Theater where an old Roy Rogers film was playing. Johnny seemed angry, but his only comment about the episode taking place in his living room was, "Hope that fat ol' bitch is gone when I get home."

She wasn't. I walked home with him just to see. The woman was still there, although by now she had put on her jacket. The books were

all neatly stacked except the one opened in front of Johnny's dad. No one else was in the living room. Johnny's dad was still looking at the book with his usual vacant stare, and the woman was still talking, though her voice now sounded strained, and she looked weary.

"Mr. Beale, I've already showed ya how ya can get this set fer almost nothin' down and a little each month. I've made my final offer t' ya, an' at that, I don't stand t' make any money on the deal. I'm ready t' deliver this set. Are ya ready t' take it?"

Johnny's dad never answered. He just sat there staring at the book opened to Alaska.

Suddenly Johnny's mother appeared from the next room. The frown had perceptibly deepened. "No, we aren't going to take them," she stated in a flat and decisive tone. "We can't afford them. Now I'm going to have to ask you to leave." And with that Mrs. Beale left the room as quickly as she had entered it as though she were afraid of the woman.

The woman got up and began to pack her books in absolute silence. I was sure she was going to lash out at all of us in some wrathful way, for I could tell she was angry to the core. As she heaved her bulk to the door, lugging the bag of books, she managed to mumble curtly, "G'night then." I noticed a piece of paper had stuck to the bottom of her shoe and was flopping along with her. I snickered to myself. That, and what she had eaten, was all she was taking with her for six hours of work. I felt both anger and pity for her. She had exploited the barebones

existence of Johnny's family by trying to bully them into buying books they didn't need and couldn't afford. She cared nothing for them, because if she ever allowed herself to care, she wouldn't be able to sell her encyclopedias. Her survival as a saleslady demanded that she not care.

Life in the business world, I was soon to discover, is too often built on that same premise as salespeople go about in desperate, uncaring forms trying to find the vulnerabilities in people's lives in order to sell their product. I was also to discover that religious folk fall into that category at times, capitalizing on the spiritual poverty of people, never really caring for them and their own particular life experience as persons, making them feel inferior and condemned if they do not subscribe to the particular brand of religion being offered, whether they need it or not.

Johnny's dad hadn't stirred. He still looked at the table where the books had been, except now there were no books. For a moment the vacant expression gave way to something of infinite sadness and shame, and I knew that he wished with all his heart that he had been able to buy those books. He had kept that funny old woman there, believing she had a sale, because it was one way he could prolong the feeling of another world -- a world that had been there in his living room for a few hours that night between the blue leatherette covers of a set of encyclopedias, a world quite apart from the monotonous and dreary existence he had known for so many years, a world where a man could buy what he wanted and go

where he wanted anytime he wanted. I'm not sure Johnny's dad knew everything he was feeling at that moment, but I could feel it for him, and I felt as if someone should talk to him.

"They were nice books," I said, "but she stayed too long. I hope she doesn't find out where I live."

Johnny's dad lifted his eyes from the table, and I saw in their red-rimmed depths a loneliness and frustration that is reflected when the aspirations of the human soul have been stirred but not released.

"They were damn nice books," he said reverently, and then he added, "An' she shore knew what she was doin.'"

Well, at least that much was true, I thought. She knew only too well what she was doing.

Slowly the curtain lowered across Johnny's dad's sun-cracked face, and the old dullness began to return to his eyes. He sighed and got up heavily and started towards the door. As he went out into the night, he said to Johnny, "Tell yer mother I went down fer a beer."

CHAPTER XII

THE MAN AND WOMAN THING

My mother says I started asking her where I came from when I was not quite five years old and that I was much more persistent about an answer than either of my older brothers had been. Unfortunately my mother came from that unenlightened generation of parents who did not know how to explain sex to their children; a generation, I might add, that far preceded her and is still with us today. She said she would tell me later when I was old enough to understand.

A few years later it was my cousin Ted whose explanation opened the door to that mysterious world of procreation for me, but at first I refused to believe him. The procedure seemed both preposterous and profane the way he described it. Gradually, however, I came to realize that that's the way it really is.

The unfortunate part of learning about sex in back alley terms from friends, rather than in an upfront discussion with parents, is that from that point on sex is always viewed as something not to be discussed with parents. In those painful years of adolescence and growing sexual awareness, when we most need adult counsel and assurance, we are often left to struggle on our own, wondering if anyone else in all the world has the same problems we do.

In Arco sex experimentation among the high school crowd of the forties was as common as it is today. I'm sure the percentage of kids who "did" overwhelmed the percentage of kids who "didn't," as is still true today. In ignorance and guilt many tragic mistakes were made. There is one instance that stands out prominently in mind because of the lives that were affected and the attitudes that surfaced. Because of the intensely personal nature of this event, I have changed some of the details to protect the persons involved, but the story is essentially true.

Arlen and Lucille Garvin were a placid, always-smiling Mormon couple who had a small farm and one of the largest families in Lost River Valley. Their offspring were like their parents in many ways -- good-natured, a little cloddish, and more than a little vapid. Apparently Arlen and Lucille took seriously the Mormon commandment to propagate and give bodies to wandering spirits, for they did just that at least twelve different times. The outstanding distinctive about the Garvin children was their names. I think Lucille must have made them up from bits and scraps of word sounds she liked. Mylvia, Rayjon, Japson, and Luradine were the ones I knew best.

Luradine Garvin sat in front of me in fifth period study hall. At sixteen she had the comfortable wide spread of hips that usually comes to a woman in her middle years, clear skin, large grey eyes, and straight brown hair. She was always clean, always friendly, and always alone. Except for her brothers and sisters, Luradine seemed to have no companions.

I remember she never had a date for any of the school dances. She could always be found in "wallflowers' row," waiting patiently for a boy to ask her to dance, which one seldom did. What an injustice our sexual roles often inflict, relegating females subordinate to the whims and fancies of males who are not sure of their own powers.

Luradine had one advantage -- she was moderately bright. I was struggling with algebra at the time, and she gave me competent and unsolicited aid with more than one stubborn equation in more than one study hall session. Even if she were lusterless, I decided she was kind, and I liked her.

One day Luradine was not in school. Her absence went on for more than a week. Then the ugly rumors began to circulate that Luradine was going to have a baby and had been expelled. It was hard to believe that such a thing could happen to this dowdy, religiously-inclined girl. I was working after school in the grocery store and heard one woman tell another she had seen Luradine out in her front yard, and she was definitely showing, and "wasn't it a shame!" In a small town privacy and anonymity are practically non-existent. Everything quickly becomes public domain. I suppose this is because there is little to occupy the attention of the people except the lives of one another.

The Baptist ladies discussed Luradine's shame thoroughly at Ladies Aid, according to my grandmother, but it was brought to a sudden end by Effie, the mentally deficient little soul who attended everything. Effie sat listening to the terrible thing about Luradine Garvin until her

ears caught the statement, "And she isn't even married." To which Effie sat up boldly and declared, "Then she isn't going to have a baby, because you see, dears, you can't have babies unless you're married. That's why I've never had one." Effie adored babies and had always wanted one of her own, but her sex education was about what mine had been when I was her mental equivalent. However, I managed to get beyond that hazy misconception that babies only arrive in some mysterious way to married folks and to no one else. Poor Effie never did. She did, however, manage to squelch the gossip session that afternoon.

A few weeks later the tragedy grew. Luradine had named the father -- Frank Raymond, manager of the county feed store, married and the father of three small children, scoutleader, and a member of the Bishopric of the Lost River LDS Ward. Luradine had been steady babysitter for the Raymonds, and speculation was that when Frank took her home at night, he did more than just take her home. There was a rumor that the church had insisted that Luradine tell who was responsible, but I don't know if that was true or not.

Several things then happened quickly. Jewel Raymond, Frank's wife, left Arco and took the children with her. Frank was removed from the Bishopric, from his role as scoutmaster, and from his position in the feed store. There were rumors that the church had even considered excommunication. Eventually he and Luradine were married. They left Arco, their tragic mistake compounded by community intolerance and unforgiveness. At sixteen Luradine had become a mother and wife to a man more than twice

her age and a virtual outcast from all that had once been her home. One can only hope that she and Frank have been able to find some semblance of happiness together and to erase some of the shame and moral stigma with which they began their married life.

Arco is not necessarily to blame, and I certainly do not mean to censure the Mormons or the Baptists. Neither do I mean to infer that Frank and Luradine should not have borne responsibility for the consequences of their own behavior. But something is fundamentally wrong in our lives in that we are seldom trained to handle sex as we are trained to handle other appetites. Something is wrong with a society that allows for no mistakes and forces the offender to bear the stern consequences of a misdeed to the end of a lifetime. The truth of the matter is that moral perfection is sadly lacking in all of us.

In my lifetime I've seen society swing from sexual repression to sexual deification. We thought we had been liberated when we threw off the shackles of our Puritanical ancestors and moved into the era of free love and pornography, but the results have been even more tragic. I should imagine that the danger in overuse and over-emphasis of sex is not increased promiscuity but ultimate impotency and the final loss of one of God's great gifts to us. The church only now is assuming a tentative courage in trying to deal with people as sexual beings. Perhaps when we have attended to the matter from a truly spiritual viewpoint that seeks to express sex in a responsible and wholesome manner, we will have begun to achieve the full use of sex in the way God intended, or at least

approximating an understanding of what God intended. I believe God meant for us to share sexual intercourse in an exclusive relationship, because it is in sex we touch an exclusive depth of another human being. It is also in sex we plumb the mysterious depths of our own essence as persons, persons manifesting ourselves for a few years on this earth as bodies, minds, and spirits. When we express our sexuality in the fullest way, we are expressing it on all of these three levels simultaneously.

I do not mean to imply that sex is the summum bonum of life, nor would I even wish to infer that marriage is defined primarily by sex. Marriage can exist without sex, but it cannot exist without presence, which is being with another person in a deeply satisfying and giving way, the way God intends. When presence is absent from a marriage and when there is no way seemingly to restore or bring about that presence, to continue the marriage is a profanity of its intended sanctity.

Jesus dealt with adultery as a spiritual matter when He said it begins in the heart with the thoughts and attitudes one has towards another person. Living together, without the deep union and presence that God meant for our marriage relationships, is adulterous. Perhaps the reason that so many marriages are unhappy and fail is because we have defined marriage in physical terms alone, instead of making it definitive in a love relationship that is truly spiritual. The same principles would apply to homosexual relationships. While homosexual "marriages" are undoubtedly right for homosexuals, they often lack stability and permanency because of the emphasis upon the sexual act alone. It is not

quite fair, however, to parallel heterosexual and homosexual relationships because of the social stigma and condemnation that surrounds the latter. This is yet another area of ignorance and misunderstanding where humanity needs to grow.

When I am tempted to lay my "moral trip" on another person, I am reminded of the woman in her mid-fifties who shared with me both the pain and the joy of a love affair that she had been having with a married man for more than twenty years. She knew there would never be more than what they had, though it was not as much as she would have liked, yet she looked straight at me and said, "Don't try to tell me I should give him up. The only real altar I've known has been in his arms, and I can tell you right now without him I wouldn't have made it this far." Who is to say what is right for another person? In that moment of realizing that an illicit love affair had been the mainstay of a woman's life and the one place where she had found fulfillment and acceptance as a person, I made some revisions of my old moral judgments.

I think I have become a part of the school of thought which affirms that the grounds of human conduct are not rooted in absolute laws, but rather are rooted in discovering what it means to be a responsible human being, caring responsibly for other human beings in their own particular and peculiar life experiences. Love, for a Christian, whether it assumes sexual dimensions or not, must always view and treat every person as an end, never as a means to any end whatsoever. If we use people as a means for our own gratification, we are grossly insensitive to the quality of

the other person, and what we call "love" is really lust. Jesus teaches us all that we need to know about the sacredness of human relationships. He says we must learn how to give before we can receive. According to Jesus, real fulfillment in any relationship is only found when the fulfillment of the other person is sought and desired.

I look back on the situation with Luradine and Frank and wish that our community could have worked for their fulfillment as persons rather than trying to obey the legality of a moral law that most of us didn't fulfill anyway. I believe that the deepest demand within all of us is our urge to love and to be loved, and this is a far deeper thing than our urge to have sex. That love is the miracle that finally helps us wade out of the morass of our past ignorance and former judgments and begin to deal responsibly and creatively with our own gifts. That love helps us attend to the human lives that share the same gifts we have, to the end that we are helping to free others and not binding them in any way.

CHAPTER XIII

SHOOT-OUT IN STANLEY

Against the magnificent backbone of the blue spires of the Sawtooth Mountains at the headwaters of the Salmon, the River of No Return, is the little village of Stanley, nearly 7000 feet in altitude with a population of less than a hundred persons in 1948 when I went there to teach school. Several years later when I visited Switzerland I realized how strongly Stanley resembled a village in the Alps. Actually there are two Stanleys, Upper and Lower. A feud of some forgotten origin had divided the original Stanley against itself and sent a few of the residents wrathfully two miles upriver to establish a new townsite. It is Upper Stanley that has continued to thrive, while the old village suffers strong intimations of becoming a ghost town. A sign on the outskirts welcomes the visitor: "THIS WAY TO STANLEY -- IT'S STILL THE OLD WEST." I can vouch for that.

Stanley Basin is remotely sheltered from the world, accessible by only two routes in those days. One was a gravel road that wound over hairpin curves of Galena Summit from the east, beyond which was the famed resort of Sun Valley; the other was also a gravel road carved as a narrow pass in the mountainside above the river from the north and the little town of Challis. The people who inhabited Stanley were strangely and deliberately withdrawn. In the summer they tolerated

the tourists who swarmed into the Basin to fish the lakes and streams, but, when winter came, everything in Stanley closed down except the post office and general store, one bar, and the school. That meant, as the cold season began, a kind of social hibernation took place which continued until the warm chinook winds of April came to melt away its icy barrier.

Winter usually began in October when the first snows piled drifts higher than windows, often closed the roads, and occasionally buried the lone telephone wire with snowslides so that Stanley was cut off from all contact with the outside world for weeks at a time. People sealed into that kind of solitude and hardship, battling temperatures that sometimes dropped to 65° below zero, will often react in negative ways, becoming withdrawn, suspicious, and quarrelsome, even though their environment may be self-imposed. I learned this through the hard school of experience, however, just as I learned that in such a setting the school often becomes the focal point of community hostilities, for it is one of the few places beyond the home where people assemble and hence may express their pent-up frustrations.

I was only seventeen years old with one year of college, an emergency teaching certificate issued by the State of Idaho, and a contract for the startling amount of $1600 a year when I went to Stanley. The first day I faced my dozen or so students I was petrified. As I distributed arithmetic books to the eighth grade students, who were just three years younger than I, I was assailed with the disturbing fear that I had forgotten how to do square root.

Fortunately my experience as a student in a one-room school gave me a sense as to how classes should be conducted in that setting, but I was in no way professionally prepared. In retrospect I can say now that perhaps those students deserved better academic instruction that I provided, but in other ways I gave them the finest commodity one human can ever give to another -- I gave them my love and respect.

I loved that little army of freckle-faced boys in patched jeans and girls in pigtails and long cotton stockings from the first day I saw them, and in a short time they loved me. Their most severe limitation was knowledge of the outside world. Some of them had never seen an airplane or ridden any form of modern transportation except a car. They were deeply sensitive about their social lack but fiercely protective and proud of their lifestyle. Suspicious with the rural person's sensitveness to and fear of ridicule, they tested me gravely and patiently for any attitude that would destroy the chance for real comradeship. But I was a rural child, too, with roots similar to their own, and, with the accurate intuition that children often have, they sensed the genuiness of my interest in them. When they saw that I believed in them, that I valued my experience as their teacher in that beautiful country, and that I played baseball just as hard as they did at recess, they gave me a loyalty and affection that was almost fierce in its intensity. It was that which was to become my strongest shield and defense in Stanley.

Our school lunch cook was a tall, gaunt woman named Mazie Bower.

She had the longest face I had ever seen, and I don't recall ever seeing her smile. It was Mazie who suggested that I would be able to rent living quarters from George and Leona Vaught, owners of a bar and sport shop that closed during the winter. The Vaught son, Warner, drove the school bus, a round trip of fifty miles up and down the basin; so I assumed that I had begun associations with two of the most important families on the Stanley social register. There was just one thing wrong -- they didn't like me. At first I put it down to rural reserve, but, as weeks wore into months, I knew that whatever they hoped for in a teacher was lacking in me. I was just grateful that they had no children in school.

The first suggestion of trouble came when I walked into the post office one afternoon and heard Mazie's voice from the adjoining store raised in a declamation of derision against you might know who. "He goes out and plays with the kids like some overgrown jackass," she was saying, "and I'm pretty sure he's not legally old enough to teach. I think our kids deserve somethin' better than that."

To dignify such defamation with any response is generally a mistake, but I was too young and hot-headed to know that. I walked over to Mazie and said, "I'm seventeen, I have a valid certificate, and if you don't like what goes on at school, why don't you stay away."

Mazie turned livid, opened her mouth a few times but couldn't seem to find any words. Then she turned and stalked out. That day she resigned as school lunch cook. The reserve that marked the attitude of the Vaughts towards me deepened into icy silence, and I wondered if I was going to be looking for a new place to live.

That night came a heavy snow, accompanied by a driving wind, that left drifts four feet high in front of the little cabin I rented from the Vaughts. I went down to school early to start the fires in the big potbellied stove and kitchen range, shovel the snow away from the door, and chop enough wood to last for the day, manual obligations that were always expected of rural teachers in those days.

Warner Vaught was at the schoolhouse when I came in. "No school today," he announced curtly.

"Who says?" I asked.

"I do. Roads closed."

"I saw the snowplows go out early. Have you talked to the road crew?"

"No need. I know the condition of these roads when it storms without talking to anybody."

"Just the same, I think we should be sure. If the snowplows go out, the children will assume the bus is coming and will be out on the road waiting." Some of the children had to walk several miles just to get to the road where they waited for the bus without any shelter.

Warner turned on me, eyes snapping with anger. "God damn it, who the hell do you think you are. You don't know this country."

I flared back in the same imperious way I had done to Mazie. "No, but unfortunately I'm starting to know some of the people."

"Then why don't you get out if you don't like it?" As Warner started towards the door, he hesitated, then swung back towards me.

"In fact, you're liable to find your ass in a snowbank if you don't." His words impressed me with the realization that a murderous violence was just a hairbreadth below the surface. He was waiting for me to accept the challenge; indeed, I am sure he was hoping I would.

I'm no fighter, at least with my fists, and never have been, except when Clayton Hall had driven me to it years earlier. So I stood silent before Warner. Much later in my life when I was confronted with the statement by Gandhi, India's Great Soul of Non-Violence, that cowardice is worse than violence, I was to remember that moment with Warner Vaught and wonder what my alternatives were.

Warner stood glaring at me, but seeing that I was not going to respond, he turned again to the door, and, as he went out into the storm, he called back, "And I want you out of that cabin by the end of this week."

Warner was right about the roads. They closed that day and remained closed for several weeks. The snowplows managed to get them opened to some of the nearest ranches, and after a few days, school resumed, but contact with the outside world was momentarily halted. It was partially that isolation factor that caused what happened next, for people became anxious and irritable as they began to think of all the things that might possibly go wrong in such situations. It was also my own inability to defuse the smoldering Bower and Vaught clan that resulted in what I call the shoot-out.

Directly after my encounter with Warner at the schoolhouse, I

located a new place to live with the caretakers of a hunters' lodge, and in the process told the story of my abused dignity to the willing ears of Stella and Lee Rowland. Stella, I learned, didn't like the Bowers and Vaughts any better than I did. She proved to be an even better communications system than Mazie, and word of Warner Vaught's threat against the school teacher spread like wildfire up and down that frozen valley, and eventually it reached the ears of Theron Sullivan, Stanley's sole delegate to the Custer County School Board. Since the superintendent in Challis could not be reached, Mr. Sullivan decided he would have to mediate, and he called a public meeting at the schoolhouse to settle the dispute.

That night the little school room was packed with parents of my students and with interested people who came to see the fireworks. I didn't know more than a dozen of those people, and almost none of them well, and I realized with some misgivings that I had hardly created the best circumstances to begin to meet the mothers and fathers of my students.

Mr. Sullivan invited me to speak first and share my grievances. As I stood in front of those people who were looking at me with a kind of stolid indifference and grave waiting, I would have given anything to be somewhere else. It seemed unreal. I began to relate my encounter with Warner Vaught, but in retelling it to that crowd it suddenly seemed petty and insignificant, hardly the kind of thing that would precipitate a community crisis. Surely we hadn't come together just to hear me tell how Warner Vaught had insulted me. Wouldn't a <u>real</u> man have fought back at

the time of challenge instead of involving others? I had been trained to believe so. My voice cracked with nervousness.

Then some man jumped to his feet in the back of the room, dimly lit by Coleman lanterns, and called out, "Where's Warner? Seems like he oughta be here." There was a rising chorus of mumbled agreement. At that point Stella Rowland stood up and began to describe how Bowers and Vaughts always harassed the road crew, which was where Lee Rowland worked. It seemed Bowers and Vaughts had written letters to the state highway department in Boise complaining that the present crew was not doing its job, all calculated, said Stella, to get Warner and Rupert Vaught hired should any of the old crew be discharged.

Another man then rose to point out that the road crew always plowed out his driveway from the road up to his barn, and he "damn well appreciated it." I recognized him as the local mail carrier, but before he could finish, a woman seated across the room sprang to her feet and accused him of throwing their mail sack into the ditch instead of putting it in their box. "An' that's exactly why I don't want my Mayanna playing with his kids," she said, glaring in my direction. Before the mail carrier could reply, the room erupted into a melee of yelling and accusations which I could not understand. Remnants of the old Stanley feud were still there, or, if not the feud itself, at least remnants of the spirit that kept the feud alive. Mr. Sullivan pounded on the desk for quiet, and when things calmed down a bit, he suggested we get back to the original purpose of the meeting.

Then a tall, Indian-looking man with long black hair stood up and said in a quiet tone, "My two kids say they ain't never had a better teacher than Mr. Romney. Used to be I couldn't get Jimmy to go to school willingly, now he cain't wait to get there. We've let Bowers and Vaughts run off the last two school teachers, and I think it's time we did somethin' about it."

There was another chorus of agreement, and I decided I didn't know the mind of that crowd at all. Then someone suggested we adjourn to John and Mary's Bar and wait there for the Bowers and Vaughts to show. There was no basis for the idea that those two families planned to show at all, but the suggestion met with unanimous approval and everyone filed outside into the bitter night and down to the bar. I was left bewildered. Stella came up and insisted I come down to the bar and get better acquainted with the people. I didn't know what else to do, so I reluctantly let myself be drawn along. I felt like a fool for having caused this mess and for not having made a better presentation. Nothing had been settled, and now it all looked incredibly silly. Why hadn't I just kept my mouth shut about the run-in with Warner Vaught?

When we got to the bar, everyone was drinking, and the mood had lightened noticeably. A long hard winter was still ahead of these people, and they were feeling the sense of isolation that met them every year at this time. Old grudges and resentments had surfaced so that they could be buried, and for a moment they were a community celebrating each other as a fortification against the time when they would again become separate.

I saw it all so clearly then that what was really wrong in Stanley was loneliness. Ranches were miles apart, and the only place of regular activity was the school. Something was needed to bring those people together once in a while just for the normal, social contacts that are essential to a people's growth and well-being as humans.

That night was a catharsis for Stanley and me as we began to realize the potential of a community that seeks to turn its hardships into pleasures. Before that drunken but orderly crowd dispersed, a social calendar had been planned for box socials, dances, pinochle parties, and potluck dinners at the schoolhouse. We discovering the makings of a dance band with a banjo player, saxaphonist, guitarist, harmonica player, and myself alternating between piano and accordion. We became known as Romney's Rhythm Ramblers and provided live music for the dances which came to be known as the Stanley Stomps. Besides helping to plan and carry out the social functions, I assisted in the organization of a Sunday School (which met on Saturday as a convenince to those who came to town for groceries and mail). Stella Rowland and I ghost-authored the news column of Stanley events for the weekly newspaper published in Challis. I worked in the post office and grocery store in the summer when school was out and at other times when relief help was needed. I knew all of the families up and down that basin and felt welcome in their homes, not just as the school teacher but as a friend.

The Bowers and Vaughts never did make it, not the night of the "shoot-out" nor to any of the subsequent events. They remained divided

and apart as long as I was there, and I expect that continued for they never were a real part of those people. I stayed a total of two and half years in Stanley. When I left to go back and finish college, I closed one of the most meaningful and happy chapters of my life. I learned more about human nature and my own nature during those two years than I had in most of the years I had lived before. I also learned something of the way God ever works to turn our mistakes into something useful, even though we are unaware of that mysterious process working on our behalf. It is one of the most powerful facts of human existence that all things work together for good if we can learn to seek the good that is inherent in all things.

I made a lot of mistakes in Stanley, especially in my relations with Mazie Bower and Warner Vaught. I have been able to forgive my seventeen-year-old self and can smile at his mistakes, and my memory is haloed with love for those two lonely families. The amazing thing is that somehow my mistakes were translated into dimensions of creative learning and a deeper understanding of life with all its possibilities, so that I did not keep making the same mistakes over and over again.

Sometimes in reflection I think it was in Stanley I did my best growing up so that, when I returned to college, I was a little closer to where I was supposed to be physically and emotionally. I realize also that in Stanley I loved and I was loved. That, it seems to me, is about the best one can ask of anyplace.

CHAPTER XIV

CHANCE AND CHANGE AT THE CRATERS

My love and respect for God's out-of-doors inspired me at one point in life to consider being a forest ranger. Although I am eminently more suited to my present vocation of ministry, I am glad for the opportunities given to me during several summers, when I was in college, to be a seasonal park ranger at the Craters of the Moon National Monument near Arco.

The Craters of the Moon is a vast lava field covering eighty square miles, recording in its caves, cones, and terraces three periods of volcanic eruption, the last of which may have taken place as recently as three hundred years ago. The area looks as if great seething cauldrons of molten rock had been poured from the sky, cooling in the flow and leaving an infinite variety of grotesque formations. Curiously enough, this desolate region has patches of trees and wild flowers, which give stark relief to the broken pavements of lava and cinder buttes that stretch for miles in black loneliness. This growth has always been a reminder to me of how nature ever works to repair its own damages, a process no less at work in our own bodies and spirits all the time.

The Craters is a special place for me, not just because of its rugged, wild beauty, but because it shows the powerful inner nature of this huge rock-planet upon which we are moving at such incredible speed

through the universe. I knew almost every inch of its surface and had even explored, far apart from the tourists' trails, the dark musty caverns that hold water that never rises more than two degrees above freezing even on the hottest days, the tree molds where living forests had been buried in boiling lava, and the cinder buttes that rise hundreds of feet above those shimmering planes of desolation. The Indians called it "the land that smokes" and camped near the caves with the icy, subterranean water. Today it is government land. The only claim the Indians have is in the memories of their ancestors who rode their ponies across its unmarked waste and pitched their tepees on its cinder planes. My claim is no less and no more authentic than theirs. I grew up in the shadows of those craters and blazed my own trails across its exteriorities, until my interiority reached out in kinship to that panoramic upheaval of earth that is ever in the act of healing itself.

A park ranger has two obligations: to appreciate his park and to be able to communicate that appreciation to the people who visit it. Part of our time was spent at the gate collecting fees and dispensing information as cars entered; the rest of the time we patrolled the roads and trails, interpreting questions and watching out for the safety of the visitors. I was struck with the lack of awareness and consideration that the average persons seemed to have for nature. They chipped away at rock formations and loaded up their cars with samples, even though it was forbidden by law. They pulled delicate wildflowers up by the handfuls and littered everywhere with beer cans, cigarettes, and kleenex. They

plied us with a steady barrage of ridiculous questions, such as, "Do you rake the hills?" "How do you get the white sand up on those mountains?" (pointing to the distant, snow-crested Lost River Range) "Is this really a piece of the moon that has fallen to the earth?" Without demeaning or ridiculing the people, the ranger tries to correct their misimpressions and instill in them a sense of reverence and care for this earth with all its marvelous variety and wonder. Occasionally he may even play a higher role of conserving a human life.

One day, when one of the other rangers was sick, I was asked by the head ranger to work on my day off and replace the sick ranger on patrol. It was about midmorning when I drove into the small parking area from which a trail leads out to the numerous caves. There I encountered a distraught mother and father who had lost their little boy. They had left him asleep in the car while they took the short hike to the cave known as Indian Tunnel, and, when they returned, he was gone. The child was four years old, and, what was worse, a deaf mute. The parents and several other tourists had searched the area frantically for almost an hour with no results.

I looked at the lava fields, shimmering in the sunlight like blue glass, resembling in places the half-deflated bodies of monstrous reptiles, and wondered where a little boy would go in such a terrifying wasteland, especially a little boy who could neither hear nor speak. The parents said he was barefooted, dressed only in a pair of shorts. The hot sun would blister him in no time, and the lava rocks, notorious for

destroying a pair of shoes on a hike, would cut his skin to shreds. If he were wandering over that rough terrain, then our chances of finding him alive amid all those depressions and jagged little gorges were indeed slim.

I stood at the edge of the lava flow with the hot wind blowing on my face, closed my eyes, and prayed, "Father God, this child is not lost in Your sight, for in You, nothing is ever lost. Give me Your sight that I might give him back to those who love him." Then I stood quietly and waited.

As I opened my eyes, I was led with some compelling, irresistable force to the place where the trail started out from the parking area. I paused at the edge of the trail and remembered that the people had told me that they had searched every inch of that trail out to the first cave. As I hesitated there, the same inner demand drew my eyes to a clump of syringa bushes that had found a sufficient foothold in the cinders to grow, and there I saw one of the large rubber-wheeled carts that we pushed over the trails when we were paving them with a mixture of oil and cinders. The carts were usually taken in when not in use, but this one had somehow been overlooked. It was propped against a rock so that a few inches of space were opened against the far end. With no conscious feeling of either resistance or acquiescence, I walked over to the cart and lifted it into the air. There sat a little boy, tear-streaked and wide-eyed, in nothing but a pair of blue shorts. Two tiny arms reached out to me, and a gutteral moan seemed to come from deep within his

voiceless little body as I lifted him up and carried him back to his grateful, weeping parents.

We decided the child must have wakened and was frightened at finding himself alone. He had gotten out of the car, and then, terrified by that strange, eerie environment, had sought shelter under the cart. His mother told me that when he was frightened at home he would often hide under the bed; so he had but obeyed an established pattern by crawling under the first thing he could find.

Was it only chance that led to my working that day when ordinarily I would have been off? Was it only chance that had left that cart beside the trail when ordinarily it would have been taken in to the storage shed? Was it only chance that led my footsteps straight to that little child, when all around him a frantic search had been conducted? Some will say yes, but I do not think so. Call it chance if you will; I call it God. A higher force than chance is in control of this universe. Life makes no sense at all if it is just a series of blind circumstances and vagaries.

That day at the Craters I came into awareness of an important truth: there is a wisdom and protection that guides our every movement and moment if we have the faith and will to tune in to it. It was the happiest moment of my brief ranger career to restore that child to his parents and to know that in God nothing is ever really lost.

CHAPTER XV

THOU SHALT NOT COVET, BUT I DID

In my life experience the establishment of a sense of self-worth was occasionally accompanied by envy and a feeling of competition against anyone who seemed to possess the security that I was seeking. I think it is this way for many. When the battered and deflated self begins to fight its way up to the light, it often mistakes those who are already basking in that light as the enemies. Not until we learn that everyone has an equal right to a place in the sun, and also that everyone has shared some of the same pits of darkness, are we free to pursue our own individual fulfillment. We are no different, no better, and no worse than anyone else at the essential levels of our being. It is, I think, terribly important to remember this in our efforts to grow towards soul perfection, for any prolonged attitude or thought that creates even the tiniest sense of isolation from God's created order is a deterrent to our freedom. We are either our own worst enemy or our own worst friend to the extent that we reject or accept both ourselves and others; and once we have learned to accept ourselves it becomes easy to accept others.

I returned to Linfield College in 1951 after a two-year teaching stint in Stanley and one year of teaching the seventh grade in Arco. Teaching had given me a new degree of self-confidence, and I faced that little Baptist campus with much more self-assurance than I had shown it

three years earlier as a green Freshman. Shortly after I arrived, I received bids from several fraternities to join, including one from Theta Chi. Theta Chi had most of the student leaders and athletes, and during my time at Linfield, it held the indisputable title of the fraternity. Today I have problems with the practice of discrimination and exclusiveness that establishes the foundations of fraternities and sororities, but when I was twenty and in the embryonic stages of learning to believe in myself, to receive a bid from Theta Chi was as if Prometheus were being unbound again by Hercules. My decision to join turned out to be a good one, not only because of the good friends I found in that group, but also because of the valuable lessons I learned. One of those lessons was named Lance Power, a member of that fraternity.

Lance Power -- Greek god, football letterman, the ideal of male charm, the female dream of masculinity, could wear anything with careless ease yet always the right attire for every occasion, always made the right responses, the object of universal adoration, the epitome of everything I wanted to be and was not. There was no visible flaw to mar the perfection of Lance Power. His perfect torso rippled with muscles of grace and symmetry, his perfect white teeth flashed a magnetic sparkle of invitation, his perfect blue eyes were rimmed with lashes long enough to arouse the envy of any girl. From the crown of his wavy, dark hair to the tips of his tanned toes, Lance Power was as perfect a speciman of of young American manhood as you could ever lay eyes on. God, how I admired him, and how I hated him! That one human being should have been

given so much seemed grossly unfair. Why, even the name -- Lance Power -- had the right ring to it, while I had to struggle along with the euphony of a first name that sounded exactly like the last and which could scarcely be pronounced clearly or understood when it was pronounced. No such hurdles for Lance Power. His very name seemed to be made for the silver marquee and neon lights, just as his physical image seemed to be created to point up the imperfections in the rest of us. Whatever else you could say about life, you could not call it fair!

The first time Lance Power ever spoke directly to me was to ask if I had a pair of nail clippers so that he could trim an ingrown toenail. I didn't, and the lowly slave felt even more lowly because he could not serve the god. But I admit I was a little startled to think that anyone as perfect as Lance Power would have an ingrown toenail. For months I alternated between adulation and despisement as Lance Power flashed his way across the football field for winning touchdowns, made a path from one stunning girl to the next, and zoomed across the periphery of every campus and fraternity activity as the guiding star around which everything else seemed to move in an orbit of worship. Always the thought kept returning that if I had another life to live, I would like to live it as Lance Power.

Then one day in American Literature class, with the students seated alphabetically, Power and Romney were side by side in the last row. Although we were fraternity brothers, we were too disparate for any extended social exchange, and this was my first observance of Lance Power at close range. I noticed, first of all, that he took no notes in class. He

slouched in his chair, doodled in his notebook, and did not respond to a single question the professor asked. I put this down to disdain for a procedure far beneath his rank and status, but it gradually began to occur to me that the interior of Lance Power might possibly have a few partially concealed flaws, even though the exterior was flawless. He sneered at students who were quick with answers and commented crudely against those who "brown-nosed" for grades. He made it a point to be obscene for the benefit of Martha Patton, a religion major who sat on the other side of him, and called her a "Jesus-Jumper." Frequently he was absent from class, excusing himself with the remark that 7:50 a.m. was too damn early to be up. When it came time for an exam, he asked to borrow my notes. Now if there is one thing I do well, it is take notes, and generally I can regurgitate those notes back in a fairly coherent manner in a test or class discussion. I was slightly reluctant to give Lance my pages of painstaking and careful recording, but my star had not yet fully fallen from its zenith, so I acquiesced. Lance not only lost the notes, on the day of the test he leaned over and whispered in my ear, "Don't be stingy with your answers. I might need some help." He flashed one of his famous smiles and settled back in his chair, confident and serene.

Perhaps I would have helped him if he had ever tossed so much as a crumb of honest kindness in my direction, but he had not. As the test began, and I observed his eyes glancing furtively and constantly at my paper, I felt the violation of my integrity, the rape of my own

essence as a person. With a deliberate and conclusive gesture, I covered my paper so he could not see it. When I rose to turn in my test, Lance was sitting there with a nearly blank sheet and a scowl on his usually pleasant face.

Later in the hall he demanded, "What the hell's the big idea? I needed help on that test and you knew it."

"I won't help anyone that way," I answered. "You can learn the material the same way I did."

The evening star never shines as brilliantly as it does in its first rising when it is the only star visible in the sky. The descent of night and the appearance of other stars reduce it to an insignificant pinpoint. So, as time passed, I began to see Lance Power in a new light. His charm and charisma still flashed out brilliantly for public view, but in a one-to-one encounter I found a shallow, self-centered, and basically unintelligent creature. Others were making the same discovery. I discovered that Lance Power's "macho" image of campus stud was a fallacy, that it was usually the girl who dropped Lance rather than Lance dropping the girl. According to Karen, the girl I dated at the time, Lance was considered crude and coarse by most of the girls who recognized, on closer acquaintance with him, that he was bound in on every side by a total infatuation with himself. I began to see how he used people for his own selfish ends. Everybody was usually doing something to serve Lance, but I never saw Lance reciprocate a favor in any way.

There finally came the day when I fully conquered all vestiges

of desire to be anything at all like Lance Power and went on to defeat him easily and unapologetically for the presidency of the fraternity. At the end of my last year I was one of six seniors selected by the faculty to be listed in "Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities," and Lance, my earlier choice as the most likely to succeed, was not even nominated. By a strange coincidence, I did become a kind of friend to Lance by helping him study for a few tests. But it was a one-sided relationship where I simply tried to save him from complete failure. It would be safe to say that Lance never appreciated nor likedme, but he was, by the time we graduated, genuinely envious of me. In three years we had completely switched roles.

One evening, about fifteen years after I had left Linfield, I was sitting in a restaurant in San Francisco with some friends when a fat, balding man came up to our table and asked, "Hey, aren't you Rod Romney?"

I confessed I was.

"Don't you remember me?"

I had to confess I did not.

"I'm Lance Power. We went to college together."

I couldn't believe my eyes. Gone forever was the only asset this man ever had -- his physical beauty. He looked swollen, tired, and incredibly old. There were heavy bags under his eyes. His stomach fell out over his pants in a grotesque bulge. All that was left of his luxuriant waves of hair were a few greasy strands. I could scarcely think of anything to say to him. He told me he was now living in the city and

invited me to call him so that we could get together for a drink, and then added with the old sneer, "Or are you still the good little boy you used to be?" We said goodbye without any definite promise to see each other again. I think we both knew any future exchange would be pointless.

Never before or since have I seen the truth so forcefully presented as it was to me in that moment of the tragic last fluttering of Lance Power's star across my horizon. To envy another human being is a wasted and dangerous activity because each of us has something unique and beautiful that is all our own if we will but attend to it. If we neglect it, the end is deterioration, both physical and spiritual. Maybe this is something of what Paul had in mind when he said, "The wages of sin is death." I have a continued sense of longing for Lance Power to discover his own inner worth and potential beauty, the soul beauty which is the only imperishable commodity we have on this earth. Ultimately, in some incarnation of life, I am sure he will. Thus my sorrow for him is tinged with hope, as it is for every human soul who hasn't learned the lessons of this life well enough to express its own higher worth. I'm sure everyone makes it. It takes some a longer time than others, but eventually we do all get home safely.

CHAPTER XVI

A FATE WORSE THAN DEATH

My father died while I was in college. The telegram came from his sister in Salt Lake City asking that I come at once. I had not seen Dad in several years. We had been out of touch with each other and I had not realized he was ill. The notice of his death brought no immediate sense of sorrow. Rather, there was a feeling of annoyance that I should be expected to leave school and go to Salt Lake City for his funeral. For one thing, I didn't have the money to make the trip from Oregon to Utah; for another, I knew Dad's family only vaguely and felt uncomfortable with the prospect of being with them. Dad's parents had never approved of my mother and had intimated to my brothers and me on more than one occasion that the divorce of our parents was not really Dad's fault. In looking back, however, the strongest emotion I felt towards Dad at that time was resentment, because he had given so little support or attention to us at those times when we needed it the most.

Dad began to drink after Mother left him, and this steadily increased as the years went by. His death came from cirrhosis of the liver brought on by consuming acute quantities of alcohol. I have several painful recollections of seeing Dad drunk, but none is more painful to recall than the day I met him face to face on the street in Arco when I was coming from school with some friends. Dad could barely stagger as he made

his way from one bar to the next, and I cringed as he looked straight at me, but his eyes were glazed over to the point where he did not even recognize me. I passed him in total silence and shame. One of the boys I was with, not knowing my Dad, made some derisive comment about his having a few too many, but Johnny Beale gave me a quick glance of sympathy. He knew from sad experience what it was like to meet his father on the street in a similar condition. The notice of Dad's death brought all the painful old memories to the surface again.

Dick was in the Navy, stationed overseas. I knew it was unlikely he could get home in time for the funeral. Dan, who had been named for my father and who had remained closer to him than I, was married and living in Arco. Over the phone he encouraged me to come home and to go to Salt Lake with him for the funeral, which finally I decided I must do.

Seeing my father in his coffin was one of the most startling and gripping moments of my life! I was face to face with the death of one of my own for the first time, and, with the awareness that Dad was dead, came also the stunning realization that things had never been complete between us, and now they never would be.

As I looked at him I began to remember the things Dad used to do for my brothers and me -- coming to get us to spend the summer months with him in that beautiful but lonely canyon where he had his mine; taking us to Utah to visit his family and planning sidetrips for our enjoyment; holding me on his lap in the car, when I was too small to reach the floor with my feet, and teaching me to drive; baiting my fish line, teaching

me to cast, and untangling my line when I got it snagged; sharing his lore of the mountains and his love of the woods with us around a campfire; kissing me goodbye with such a look of longing when he took me home; writing me a letter when I graduated from high school and enclosing five dollars with a touching apology because he could not do more towards helping me go to college, the only letter I ever received from him. The memory came flooding back of the time when I had gone outside one night to the little outhouse back of the cabin in Bell Mountain Canyon, and, as I was coming back, I was scared half out of my wits by a loud scream that came from the mountainside back of the cabin. It sounded like a human voice. Icy terror held me paralyzed for several moments, and in those few seconds Dad ran from the cabin, gathered me in his arms, and carried me inside. He said it was a cougar who lived in one of the higher canyons and that it would not bother us. Nevertheless, I remember he checked the rifle to see if it was loaded. After we went to bed, I snuggled against his side, listening for the sound again which was not repeated, falling asleep feeling protected and secure. Standing there at Dad's coffin, I remembered all of these things. I looked down at his hands, gnarled and twisted from years of swinging a miner's pick, and at his brow, furrowed with heavy lines of care that must have deepened through the years when he saw his dreams coming to naught and all he loved slipping from him.

"Oh, Dad," I thought through the heavy rush of tears, "you were a good man, and I never knew it while you were here. You showed your

love to us in so many ways, and I never once said I loved you. Such a waste for all of us that we never really found each other in time. Such a waste!" In that moment I loved and forgave him for all that he had done or failed to do. I forgave him for the years of neglect and lack of support, for I knew he had done the best he could.

For the rest of that day and the next I found myself weeping when no one was around me. I couldn't seem to stop. At the funeral service I listened to the Mormon bishop stumbling through a eulogy, and I thought, "You never knew him. You haven't the right to say anything about him." At the grave I heard the dull words of commital, shivered against the icy wind that was blowing, and felt the ache within me grow heavier. On the drive back to Idaho I kept turning my face away from Dan, watching the passing landscape, so that he would not notice the tears that kept spilling out. I was not grieving because my father had died; I was grieving because for me he had never really lived!

But never imagine that there is not a cleansing in grief. Gradually the ache was replaced with a sense of peace, a peace which was magnified into an abiding reality when one night in a dream my father came and placed his hands on my head. There were no words, but I awoke with a strong feeling of his touch and a deep sense of his love. I knew that somehow I was cleansed then of all the resentment or hostility that I had consciously or unconsciously nurtured against my father. I believe that it was he, himself, who helped do this for me and who, from "the other side," brought to fulfillment what time and circumstances did not permit to be completed on this side.

I have never doubted immortality since that experience. I am just as confident that we live beyond the grave as I am confident that we live at all. Nor do I for a single moment think that life is framed between what we call birth and death. If life is anything at all, it is eternal, which means that it has neither beginning nor ending. I do not fear death. As much as I cherish this life now, I believe that death, whenever and wherever it comes, is a friend. We do not go out into a dark unknown, but, rather we go to a beautiful reception of waiting love unlike anything we have known here.

No, I do not fear death, but my father's passing and subsequent experiences with death have taught me to realize there are at least two things that are worse than death. One of these is self-destruction, obliterating the holy image in me until only death can restore it. There are many ways we can destroy the self. My father did it through alcohol, a futile escape from his broken dreams. I've watched young people do it through other kinds of drugs. People also destroy themselves through destructive attitudes and actions against others, and sometimes, when they have hopelessly missed the mark of fulfilling what they in essence are meant to be, death is a friend that takes them to a higher realm of resting and learning until they can begin again.

There is another thing I fear more than death and that is out-living my usefulness, living too long, stretching the years of my mortal existence beyond their appointed time. Sudden death, no matter when it comes, is merciful in comparison to a life of lingering illness and

advanced age, when most of life's essential faculties have been destroyed and the capacity to enjoy life has fled. Rest homes or convalescent hospitals for the elderly are an anathema to me. I suppose, in one sense, they are necessary, but I can't overcome the feelings of depression and despair that often overwhelm me when I walk into one of those places. The last thing old people need when they are sick and lonely is more old people who are also sick and lonely. I do not mean to condemn these insitutions with one stroke of the brush. Some of them are well-staffed, clean, and cheery; every effort is made to provide meaningful and useful activities for the residents; and the employees do have a genuine sense of care for those who live there. Many of them, however, are little better than prisons. Care is poor and almost nil; food is abominable; and the patients are treated as retarded infants, which eventually they do become.

A woman in my church, who had lived a long life of usefulness and devoted service, had to be placed in one of these homes because of a debilitating illness. She was fortunate in that it was one of the better homes, but she held my hand each time I went to see her and cried pietously to go home. Her roommate was a wispy little lady who sat all day in a chair holding a stuffed dog which she stroked and talked to, starting up eagerly each time someone came into the room as though she hoped it would be someone coming to see her. As far as I know, she never had a visitor. The halls were full of zombie-looking figures shuffling along with walkers or canes or sitting in wheelchairs in utter dejection.

Everywhere was the feeling of abjuration, repudiation, abandonment. These were the unwanted ones who had lived too long. In a few weeks my friend ceased crying and settled into a state of apathetic indifference. Her family came faithfully to see her each day and deplored the fact that she must be there, but she had reached such a state of helplessness it was impossible for anyone to care for her at home.

We have a monster on our hands today -- the monster of old age. We have succeeded in extending the life span, but by adding quantity to the years a person may live, we have not understood how to add quality. We know how to make the heart beat longer, but we do not know how to keep the brain alive, and so each day we consign people to finish out their lives in those miserable halls that ever reek of urine and disinfectant.

I do not have a solution. I wish I did. I can only resolve not to forget those who have been placed in those insitutions and to visit them when I can. I will also make every effort to claim my highest potential while I can and to approach my declining years with full trust in God's powers to take me when my life is finished and to allow me, while I am here, the best possible uses of my reason and body. Should that fail, I am still trying to live now in a framework of mind that will make adequate preparation for old age to be glorious rather than gloomy. There are numerous old people, many of them in rest homes, who assure me by example that this is possible.

A few years ago an elderly man in our community took his own life and that of his wife who was dying with cancer. He left a note indicat-

ing that they were unable to face life with the burdens of terminal illness and advanced age. While I may not fully agree with all that he did, I do understand. Medical measures that only prolong human suffering work as much against God as suicide and euthanasia. Keeping people alive on machines who are wasting away in comas is abhorrent to me and an indication that we have such little faith in any life beyond this one that we are afraid to trust the process designed to take people on. My wife and I have often talked about this and have agreed we want no artificial means to sustain life when we know absolutely that no real life is there to sustain.

There is scarcely a week goes by for me now that I do not try to give support to people who are facing death, either for themselves or for a loved one. It is one of the most wrenching of all life experiences, to give up one with whom the deepest moments and intimacies of life have been shared. Yet shining through these tragedies, over and over again, I have seen some invisible comfort come to ease the aching or fearful heart, some new strength and courage to overpower the bitter grief and despair, as it did for me when my father died. In his death I saw the perfect healing of his lonely, unfulfilled life as well as our own broken relationship. Just as something within wills our physical healing, something above wills our spiritual healing. Death is the final way this is accomplished.

Death, then, is not the worst thing that can happen to us. It is as much a reality as birth, growth, maturity, and old age. To destroy

one's self wilfully is worse than death. To be abandoned and rejected, or to outlive one's usefulness -- these are worse than death. Each of us has the right to a full life and the right to die with dignity. With God's help and the help of each other, we can yet restore these rights to those who may not have them.

CHAPTER XVII

THE ESSENTIAL GOODNESS OF A BAD BOY

I graduated from Linfield College, a liberal arts school with a Baptist heritage in McMinnville, Oregon, in the spring of 1954. The greatest consequence of my college career was that I emerged from it a more self-confident individual than when I had entered. Some of the fruits, planted by those who had believed in me, had begun to ripen. The process was far from finished; in fact, it never would be finished, but the winter of my life had melted into some abiding sense of spring. I was deeply in debt financially for I had worked and borrowed to put myself through college. Uncertain as to the next step and battling the persistent inclination I felt toward the ministry, I decided to return to Arco to teach English and music in the high school. Some regarded it as a foolish move, reminding me that a prophet is without honor in his own country, but I knew Arco better than I knew myself, and I believed there was something there for me to do. If nothing else, I could repay Arco a little of what it had done for me.

Miss Noble was still teaching, though now nearing retirement. How unselfishly she had poured out her life in that little place, depreciating herself as nothing but "an old maid Mormon schoolmarm," never destined to realize all the good she may have encouraged in others! Surely it was her own example that set me on my course as a teacher.

Arco now had a new high school which brought students by buses from all over Butte County with an enrollment five times what it had been when I was in school there. I knew many of the students, or at least I knew their families. It gave me an advantage over those teachers who came to Arco as strangers and had to learn from the ground up.

The problems in that high school were not dissimilar to those when I had attended a few years earlier, the biggest one still being alcohol. Except for the more earnest brand of Mormon youngster who had stern convictions imparted to him by his elders against imbibing any stimulant, including tea and coffee, most of the students drank. Every high school teacher dreaded the assignment of chaperoning a school dance for it usually meant policing for alcohol and evicting those who were drunk and disorderly, no small fete in the cases of some of the older and larger boys. But aside from that, Arco was a pleasant place to teach, and the school had few problems by comparison to urban schools I know today.

If one had wanted to name the bad boy of the school, anyone with any degree of acquaintance no matter how superficial, would have named Jerry as the school's main cause of disturbance. No teacher wanted Jerry in class. His response to rules was to defy them, and his response to an academic assignment was to ignore it. He was only in school because he had to be there, and he seemed bent on making the school sorry it had ever insisted on his presence.

We usually live up to the expectations others have of us.

People labeled Jerry bad, and Jerry did his best to fulfill that image. When Mr. Mills evicted Jerry from biology class with some hearty and well-directed insults, Jerry advised him not to think it was settled that easily. That night all the tires on Mr. Mills' car were slashed. No one could prove it was Jerry, but who could doubt it?

Jerry was not in any of my classes when the year began, but I ended up with him in English, speech, and chorus, none of which particularly suited his temperment or my ambitions. I seemed to be the only teacher with any sense of endurance of Jerry, however; so as he was gradually eliminated from his other classes, a desperate principal assigned him to me as a last ditch effort to keep from expelling him.

No one is ever bad without cause. Every hostile act of social misbehavior has a reason, and generally the reason is a lack of wise and consistent love. People become unloving when they are not loved. Jerry was loved by his parents, but theirs was not a wise love; it was more an affectionate indulgence and doting instead of a balance of affirmation and restriction. They made the serious mistake of never setting limits for Jerry. Thus, when Jerry got into trouble with a teacher, as he was inevitably destined to do with any authority figure who tried to impose limits, it was always the teacher's fault as far as Jerry's parents were concerned. They championed his cause at every turn and never once helped Jerry feel he was wrong or that he must bear consequences for his actions. It was a classic case of misguided parental love. Never restricted at home, why then should Jerry accept restriction at school? The pattern

had been eighteen years in the making, the full scope of Jerry's lifetime.

Yet in spite of Jerry's aberrant deportment, I liked him. I felt that he was crying out for attention, attention that would say yes to him as a person while saying no to many of the things he was doing. I decided that it was worth an effort to see if Jerry could respond to genuine kindness tempered with limits. One day, after he had cut up all through chorus, I kept him after class and said, "Jerry, everybody starts in chorus with an A. You lose that grade by not trying. If you'll try to cooperate with what I'm trying to do in here, you'll leave this class with an A." I happened to know he had never had an A in his life. He looked a little interested, and for a few days he was better; but the old habits were deep and could not be easily erased. Finally I had to seat him apart from the others, but that was a mistake because he began to create howling sounds that interfered with all our attempts to sing.

Again in an after-class conference I tried to appeal to some sane or higher instinct in Jerry. "You need every credit to graduate," I told him. "Don't throw away that chance when you are so close." Actually it was doubtful if Jerry could graduate, for, although he was a senior, his record was a pathetic inscription of failures and near failures. He could sing a little and seemed to enjoy it occasionally; so his participation in chorus became slightly better, though it was never model.

He was worse in English and speech because he hated both. I would keep him after class to help him with his assignments so that he would have something to turn in, and usually he would lose his paper before the next day. The biggest tragedy was that Jerry was quick and alert; he just refused to apply himself academically. I tried, during those enforced tutoring sessions, to draw out some finer side of Jerry. When no other students were around to provide an audience, Jerry dropped his debonair and buffoonish stance and would talk more seriously about himself and his life ambitions. He began dropping into my room each morning before classes started. If other students were present, he was coarse and prankish as usual, but, if we were alone, he seemed to enjoy talking on a more serious vein. Gradually his conduct became a bit more acceptable in class, and I was beginning to feel some encouraged.

I was advisor to the high school youth group at the Baptist Church at the time and encouraged Jerry to come. He laughed uproariously at the idea of going to church, but I felt he was pleased that I would invite him. One day I heard him in the hall telling a friend that Mr. Romney had asked him to come over and help lead the church youth group, and he just might do it. I preached the sermon one Sunday in the absence of the minister and was both startled and pleased to see Jerry and two of his friends in the congregation.

But, alas, the path of moral reformation is a hard one, even for a teen ager, and Jerry couldn't quite make it. He came to chorus one afternoon with a scowl on his countenance that boded ill for anyone

who got in his way. I learned later he had been evicted from government class earlier and had spent the greater part of the previous hour in the principal's office trading verbal onslaughts with that poor man who had just about reached the end of his second mile with Jerry. Sitting down next to one of his friends, Jerry went into a lengthy and vitriolic discussion of what had just happened to him. I wasn't aware of what had just preceded, and I kept asking Jerry to be quiet, but it was as though I were not there. Finally, in total exasperation, I yelled, "Jerry, keep quiet or get out of here."

Jerry rose to his feet. With a white rage as intense as I had ever seen in anyone, he proceeded to tell me where I could go and what I could do when I got there, and, on the wings of those obscene directions, Jerry stalked out. It was the last I saw of him for several months.

As you might imagine, Jerry's parents blamed me for the fact that Jerry was expelled and thus could not graduate. The principal had told Jerry if he got kicked out of one more class he would be forced to evict him from school. The fact is that Jerry couldn't have graduated anyway, but someone besides Jerry had to be the fall guy, and I was it.

It was the night of the senior prom where Jerry's class was celebrating its graduation into the world when Jerry appeared at the dance drunk and dishevelled. I was class advisor with the unhappy task of keeping out the students who were drinking, and, when I saw Jerry lurch in, my heart sank thinking of the inevitable clash I knew would follow. But Jerry came straight for me, and before I could do a thing,

he put both arms on my shoulders, and, swaying a little, delivered one of the most eloquent speeches of confession I've ever heard, albeit slightly slurred and punctuated liberally with colorful profanities.

"I've been a no-good bastard," he said, "but you were one who always played fair and square with me. I deserve everything I got. I only wish I hadn't said what I said to you that day in chorus. You gave me every break, and I'll never forget you for it." Maybe he would never have been able to do it without the fortification of courage provided by liquor, but it was one of the finest and most honest things I'd ever seen Jerry do. It made me feel that we had salvaged something in our relationship after all.

It seems odd in looking back at those three years of high school teaching that I should select to write about Jerry, who was in one way a failure story. I might have written about the fact that my high school chorus, made up for two hundred students from that student body of three hundred, went to a state contest and received a first place trophy. I might have recalled the Gilbert and Sullivan light operas that we produced that drew bigger crowds than the athletic events and featured the first string of football players in the chorus. I might have talked about some gifted student I taught who went on to some significant accomplishment. Instead I choose to remember Jerry who never graduated, who called me some obscene names, and who remained in Arco as a kind of itinerant cowboy and laborer, continuing to act out, I'm told, the same aggressive and belligerant behavior as an adult that he had manifested as a teen-ager.

But I remember Jerry because there were rare times when I was given glimpses of his inherent goodness and worth, and because he showed me that, if you work consistently and sincerely, a genuine respect and interest directed towards another person always brings beneficial results. Maybe our impact on each other was slight, but it bore some good effect for both of us. It's enough to keep me believing that being treated with love is what everyone needs, because everyone has an essential goodness that is released by love and love alone.

CHAPTER XVIII

MIRACLE AT THE MATTERHORN

Some might wonder that I would go to seminary with no clear notion of why I was going. Perhaps I was trying to satisfy certain people who had long encouraged me to go. Perhaps I was also trying to satisfy an undefined and disturbing inclination within me that kept saying I was destined to be a minister. I am not really sure I know.

I had completed six years of teaching in Stanley and Arco and had enjoyed every one of those years. I was a good teacher, at least by the time those six years were ended; yet I never had a feeling of permanency about teaching. There were even aspects of it I disliked -- namely the necessity of a constant authoritarian approach which is mandatory on the high school level unless one wants continuous pandemonium in the classroom. So I left teaching with a feeling of achievment, many warm friendships with students, but no sad regrets that it was not meant to go on.

I chose the Berkeley Baptist Divinity School for seminary mainly because I knew several people who had gone there and liked it. Also I was intrigued with the chance to spend three years in the San Francisco Bay Area. Arco, with all its prolifics, had left me feeling culturally starved.

Seminary was the best academic experience I ever had. I en-

joyed the classes, the professors, and the students. There was a family feeling in that school that was one of the most remarkable features I have ever known in an educational institution, generated by the common faith and vocation shared by everyone who was there. But as those three years drew to a close, and as other students went out as prospective candidates for church service or missionary work, I still didn't know which way to go. My leanings towards the pastorate were now a little stronger, but I still had much ambivalency as well as ambitions in some other directions.

More than anything else at that time in life I wanted to go to Europe, and I was praying that such an opportunity would come along. A few months before graduation I read in the newspaper of interviews being conducted at the University of California for experienced teachers and counselors to work overseas for at least a year under the auspices of the U.S. Army and Air Force. I was almost the first one in line, and, when the interview was finished, I knew I had a good chance. Two weeks before graduation the confirmation came that I was accepted for employment in the Verdun High School in southeastern France. You can imagine how happy and grateful I was.

I decided to go ahead with ordination and accept the year in Europe as a moratorium from God before settling down in the ministry. It would not be inaccurate to say that I struck a kind of bargain with God. My ordination was held in Arco in May, 1960, in the same little church that had been a part of so many important moments in my life. It was

crowded with family members, friends, and people I had known all my life, and students I had taught. Gerald Dryden, the minister who had baptized me and led me through those early steps of my Christian growth, and who had always encouraged me to be a minister, returned from a church he was pastoring in Montana and preached the ordination sermon. It was a warm and fulfilling occasion for me in every way.

The year in Europe helped satisfy my wanderlust and gave me a chance to gain perspective on my whole life course up to that time. I was advisor/coundselor to sixty high school boys, dependents of American military personnel stationed in France, who came from various military bases throughout the area to live in a dormitory and attend school. My job was to be a kind of foster parent to them from the time they got out of school in the afternoon until they returned the next morning. This included supervising their recreation, meals, and evening study time. I even coached the soccer team, a most unlikely assignment since I didn't even know how many players on a team, and we were defeated miserably every game we played. Still we had a good time.

Since the students all went home Friday evening and didn't return until Monday morning, I had long week-ends free for my own interests. I purchased a car and was able to travel into every country in western Europe during the course of that year, usually in the company of other teachers with whom I had become friends. The travel experience was exhilarating, and the work was not unpleasant, but one year was enough. When the same job was offered to me at the American High School in Paris,

I declined. My moratorium was up, and if I was going to play honest with God, it was time to return home. But to what?

Then came a letter from a church in Oakland inquiring if I would be interested in a position on the staff as assistant minister. The seminary, knowing I might soon be coming home, had submitted by name to the church as a prospect. Included in my responsibilities would be directing the music program and giving occasional assistance on a radio broadcast which the church sponsored. The name of the church was Lakeshore Avenue Baptist. I knew little about it except that it was a moderately large congregation in an urban setting. I was interested in the setting for I had grown to love the Bay Area when I was in school there, but I was not wildly enthusiastic. Some of the old reluctant feelings I had against the ministry began to surface again.

It was at that point that a friend, graduating from seminary, wrote and said that he was coming to Europe to follow the vagabond trail. He wanted to know if it would be possible to fit any of our travel plans together for the summer. I wrote Gary that I would be agreeable to spending a month or more traveling with him, and, at the same time, I wrote to the Lakeshore Church that I was interested but needed a little more time to make a decision. I promised that I would decide soon.

I met Gary in Le Havre, France in the middle of June, and we started a leisurely trek up through the Scandinavian countries with no fixed itinerary, stopping and going whenever and wherever the fancy struck us. It would have been an ideal adventure but for one thing -- I was restless

and unsettled. It was time to decide about the ministry one way or the other. I was also a little homesick, having been away now for a year.

Driven by some nameless haste, I started pushing south through Germany and into Switzerland. Amiable Gary was agreeable to any plan. He had come overseas to travel for a year, with or without me, and as long as I was there, he was content to let me make the travel plans. I told him of my lifelong desire to see the Matterhorn, a mountain in the Alps on the Swiss-Italian border, and we decided to go there before swinging down into Italy.

The nearest village to the Matterhorn is Zermatt which is only reached by riding a cogwheel railway that climbs several thousand feet through incomparable mountain scenery. As we mounted higher and higher through that Alpine splendor, I began to feel a stir of excitement. I had read about the Matterhorn and viewed it in so many pictures that for years I had possessed it as my own without ever actually seeing it. Little wonder that I kept peering eagerly ahead.

Zermatt is a cliché in terms of being picturesque. When we left the little train, it was to step into a picture postcard world of such scenic perfection as could exist only in one's imagination, a perfection which was slightly marred by the contrived and busy air that most resorts have and the usual crowds of pleasure-seekers.

But alas, the Matterhorn had not been seen for three days. It had been shrouded in heavy clouds and not once had it deigned to show its craggy splendor to the gaping eyes of the tourists who stood at its feet,

all touched by a little of that "Matterhorn madness" that brings people together from every corner of the world to climb, to ski, or just to see that mountain.

We wandered through the narrow chalet-lined streets in a disconsolate mood, debating whether we should try to stay in Zermatt all night. After lunch I felt the need to be alone and suggested to Gary we separate and meet in a couple of hours to make our decision.

Alone, I wandered up a little foot path that led up the slopes and out of the village. On the side of an incline I sat down on a couch of lush, green grass and looked wistfully across a gorge to where the landscape disappeared in fog, the place where the Matterhorn was supposed to be when it chose to show itself. Suddenly I knew why I wanted to be alone. I wanted to pray. No, it was more than that -- I had to pray. I was literally being driven to it by an overwhelming need for direction, and, though at that stage in my life I was not absolutely certain that praying was a reliable method for finding guidance, I knew that it usually induced a certain serenity within me so that I could see my situation more clearly and calmly.

Every crossroads we face seems, at the time, to be the most critical of any we have known. It seemed so to me in that hour. Like Robert Frost who wrote his poem about the difference it made in his life when he chose one road over the other at a diverging in the woods, I knew that the future of all I was to be and do was at stake then. I knew that if I did not take the Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church, in all likelihood

I would never take any church. But could I make it in the ministry? Would I fail? Did I have enough faith to sustain me, or would I end up dropping out after a few years? Was I suited for the lifestyle of a minister? Was the church the best place for me to work? Could I accede to the demands of a congregation, the lack of privacy, the moral pressures? Was this what God wanted me to?

"Oh God," I began, and then nothing more would come. I realized it had been a long time since I had prayed. I also realized if God knew anything at all about me, He knew what I was feeling and wanting at that moment. Why did I have to tell Him, to plead for His guidance? Was getting in touch with God just a way of getting in touch with one's self?

"God," I began again, "I don't even know if you're there, or if I'm just talking to myself." I had indulged in agnosticism and neglected all spiritual disciplines for so long that I had practically no spiritual resource. I put my head down on my knees in mute supplication to Whomever or Whatever was the Great Constructor of Life, bereft of all words. My soul rose out of me in a wordless appeal for help, but my lips could not voice the request for fear it would return to me empty and leave me with an even greater void.

Then into my mind stole the Old Testament story of Gideon. Gideon, you may remember, helped Israel defeat the Midianites. But before he could be sure that he was to do this, he took a fleece of wool and put it out on the ground and then said to God, "If there is dew on

the fleece in the morning and the ground is dry, then I know you will help me deliver Israel." The next morning the fleece was wet and the ground was dry.

But Gideon still couldn't believe; so he said to God, "Don't be angry with me, but speak once more. This time let the fleece be dry and the ground wet." The next morning it was so, and Gideon led his army into battle against Midian and defeated them.

Don't ask me why that story came to me just then. That's one of the mysteries of mnemonics, memory-making, that I spoke of in an earlier chapter. Something within us pushes things up to the conscious level at significant times when we seem to need them, and this process is always life-giving. So aided by the marvelous power of thought, I went back across the years to a day in church when the minister told the story of Gideon and then said, "Sometimes in life there are occasions when we have the right to lay the fleece."

I raised my head, and a faint glimmer of hope began to stir within me. Did I dare? Did I have the right?

Before intellect could take over with a rational analysis, I cried out with the sincerest of all longings, "O God, if you want me to go to that church in Oakland, let me see that mountain."

The words had no more than left me when the mists parted as though drawn apart by some invisible hand, and there before me in all its created splendor and majestic glory stood the Matterhorn!

There are moments in our experience that defy description, that

refuse to be confined by words, that are too holy for even the desecration of thought. For a long time after the clouds had pealed away, I was motionless. My eyes scaled carefully to the tip of that frightening peak that looked a little like an ice cream bar that has been licked until the top is slightly lopped over. I do not know how long I sat in silent worship before that monolithic stone altar, drinking in its every detail and changing mood. I only know when I stood up to walk back to town, as the mists began to enshroud the peak again, that I was at peace as I had not been in a long time.

I did not tell Gary about the experience. I could not share it with anyone just then. He was jubilant that we had seen the Matterhorn after all and had been running all over the village looking for me, afraid I might have missed it. On the ride down the cogwheel rail, he bubbled over about going next to Italy.

We camped that night in an open meadow,and I told him I would be going back to the States soon, that I had decided to take the position at the church in Oakland. I left him hitchhiking his way into Italy, while I drove back to Rotterdam to ship my car to the States and to write the church in Oakland that I would come to meet with the committee in late August. It never once occurred to me that they might not want me. I knew with deep certainty that I was going to Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church.

Details from this point are not important, except as that Matterhorn miracle grew into perspective. For a long time I did not cast the

pearls of this experience before a single person. Probably I was afraid no one would understand, or might reflect on it in such a way as ~~would~~ to destroy it for me. I think, too, that I needed time to verify that it was right for me to come to Oakland, that my miracle really was a miracle and not some utterly commonplace circumstance in the everyday realm of things.

I began my work at Lakeshore in the fall of 1961 and knew within a short time that the move had been eminently right for me. Then six months after my arrival, Dr. Harold Geistweit, the pastor, retired, and the burden of administrative and pastoral work fell on me as the pulpit committee began to conduct a search for a new minister.

There was never an inkling in my mind that I would be considered for that position. I knew full well that I lacked the experience and stamina to pastor a church like Lakeshore that required, among other things, production of a radio broadcast five mornings of every week. But after a few months had gone by, some members began to encourage me to consider the pastor's position. The committee was in the process of looking at several well-known and successful American Baptist pastors, and alongside them I looked professionally frail and inconspicuous. I publicly announced one Sunday morning that I appreciated the support of the people during this interim time but had no wish to be considered for the role of senior leadership.

A few more months passed, and the Pulpit Committee had not yet recommended a new pastor. Then a petition was circulated in the church,

signed by several hundred members, asking that I reconsider. By this time I was doing the major amount of preaching, and apparently people felt I had proved myself capable. I agreed to think it over and to pray about it.

One night, while searching for an answer, I opened the Bible to Jeremiah; I might say it was by accident but I do not think it was that. Frankly, I am not much given to seeking guidance or devotional help in the Old Testament, but, as the Bible fell open to the first chapter of Jeremiah, I met myself. Here was a man arguing with God about going out as a prophet because he did not know how to speak, because he thought he was too young. God says to him, "Do not say, 'I am only a youth,' for to all to whom I send you you shall go, and whatever I command you you shall speak. Be not afraid of them for I am with you to deliver you." There was my answer, not as dramatic as Gideon had given it to me at the Matterhorn, but just as certain. I knew by the feeling of assurance rising within me that God was calling me to be the pastor of the Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church.

Even Gideon asked for two signs, however; so I asked for a unanimous call from the church. I did not want to work through dissenting segments of people to prove myself. Now it seems like a rather silly thing to have done, but, you see, I needed double amounts of confidence and support then.

On February 13, 1963, the congregation met and voted unanimously to call me as its pastor, and on March 3 I was formally installed.

There is a statement that we often go kicking and screaming to our good. My trail of resistance finally brought me into the greatest good I have ever known -- the ministry. All my fears and anxieties had been groundless for I found myself happy and content. That doesn't mean I have not had discouraging times in the ministry -- I have. It doesn't mean I have not sometimes felt like quitting -- I have. But those times have been microscopic in comparison to the overriding pleasure and joy I have found as the pastor of that congregation. Something even more wonderful was the fact that those people have also pastored me, allowing me to be myself while yet giving me their support and love. I am sure now that God brought us together because it was uniquely right for all.

There finally came the day when I shared my Matterhorn experience in a sermon. I knew when it was the right time to do this because my years at Lakeshore had verified for me the authenticity of the guidance that came that day. A seminary student working in our church actually helped me to a wiser understanding of my miracle by challenging it.

"After all," he said to me, "the clouds would have probably lifted then whether you had been there or not. And you would have seen the Matterhorn even if you hadn't prayed."

I thought for a moment and then said, "You're undoubtedly right. I would hate to think my prayer, uttered that day from the abyss of almost no faith, could have power over the elements and that God would be whimsical or capricious enough to be swayed that way. But the miracle to me is not that the clouds moved, but that I was moved, moved to utter

a prayer of need and longing at that precise moment, perfectly coordinated to the simple movement of those clouds, yet infinitely linked to the Divine Creator whose touch on our lives is always the motivating factor in any praying we ever do."

We call this initiative action of God prevenience, which means that before we begin to pray at all, God is acting upon us and in us, preparing and directing the way for our response. All our praying is then but a response to God, initiated by God's prior action in our lives.

How God must have yearned over me during the days of my confusion until He could finally pierce through the mists with some signal to steer me out of my darkness! I know, therefore, that the miracle at the Matterhorn was not the lifting of the clouds from the mountain at the moment of my prayer, but the lifting of the clouds from my own soul so that I could move on into life with a sense of peace and purpose. The rebirth of life at any given moment is always the greatest miracle!

CHAPTER XIX

TWO IS A MYSTICAL NUMBER

There is one person, prominent in my later lifestory, who has appeared only fleetingly thus far. It is time now to introduce you to Beverly, my wife.

There is a romantic and idealistic concept floating around that somewhere there is a counterpart for each of us, a person destined to be our better half by completing the traits and characteristics in us that nature failed to bestow and that with that person we become a more fulfilled entity than we could ever be alone. I cannot agree with all of that concept because I do not think we achieve our individual destinies in another person. We achieve them within ourselves and in God. Nevertheless, I must confess, that when I met Beverly I met the person who elicited a better part of me.

Marriage is not a relationship where we lose our individuality; rather the opposite takes place. A truly intimate relationship in marriage, or whatever, always enlarges and enriches us as persons, but it also protects our privacy as individuals. Intimacy with another is always an improvement on being alone, but intimacy cannot exist without singleness. You cannot love another if you don't love yourself. This does not mean, that if you love yourself you are complete in and of yourself. You still need other people.

When I married Beverly, I had become a fairly well-defined person in my own view, but there were qualities within each of us that could only be nurtured, explored, and cultivated in intimacy with another person. We could have lived without each other, but I don't see how I could have lived as fully.

The old saw, "Marriages are made in heaven," may have some truth in that the divine plan written for us by God takes into account those who will share and help shape this plan into being, and that includes our mates. However, I would not want to be so callous or naive as to infer that everyone is destined for marriage and is an unfulfilled person without it. Certain people do not need marriage; they may have a lifestyle, a profession, or a personality that makes marriage impossible. That does not rule out the fact that I think we all need intimacy in one form or another. No one comes to know himself or herself through introspection or solitude alone; it takes dialogue and friendship with other persons. As the Bible says, it is not good for man (woman) to be alone. We all need fellowship and encounter. We all need to understand others and to sense that others understand us.

Still some people haven't been able to get married, often because the right one has not come along, or the opportunity has not presented itself. I have great admiration for single people, especially women, who would like to be married more than anything else, and yet have gone ahead with full, productive lives. I think these kinds of persons bless the world more unselfishly with their gifts than married people who

are so bound up in each other that they can't see beyond their own perimeters.

Generally we are led to marriage with the wrong set of expectations. We think it is that ideal state of storybook ecstasy where we live happily ever after in the arms of another; whereas, the real truth is that marriage is undoubtedly one of the most difficult and challenging enterprises of a lifetime. Real happiness in marriage is only won by constant determination and a committed willingness to work for it. Nothing as worthwhile and valuable as intimacy can occur overnight.

My marriage with Beverly has been good; in many ways it has been almost ideal. Emotionally we are about as compatible as two persons can be. But we have also had the normal strains and sufferings that any relationship of value has. We have endured because we love each other in a committed way, and we have grown closer because of the frankness we shared in working out together our marital happiness.

I met Beverly on a blind date on New Year's Eve, 1962. I had returned to Arco to spend Christmas with my family and to deliberate at a distance the invitation to become the pastor of the Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church in Oakland. A close friend of mine from college days, Verne Duncan, was Superintendent of Schools in Arco. (He is now Superintendent of Public Instruction for the State of Oregon.) He met me with glowing descriptions of the new home economics teacher in Arco and said he had arranged for us to meet. Neither the home economics teacher nor I had much interest in the prospect. She had heard enough about Rodney Romney to convince her I was simply Arco's matinee idol. (Remember I had

grown up in Arco, taught school, and had been ordained into the ministry there -- Arco regarded me as one of its more favorable products.) As for me, I had been through the blind date syndrome often enough to know that the only way most blind dates can be really pleasant is for one to be literally blind. They are usually arranged by well-meaning friends who feel sorry for you because you don't have anybody, or who may feel a little angry because you are still footloose and fancy free. So we each went reluctantly to the ordeal of our first date.

Beverly lived in eastern Oregon where she had grown up on a farm in a loving and secure family. Her father had died while she was in college, but the stable affection and deep caring that existed in that household of parents and three daughters were rare and genuine. Her environment was almost everything mine was not, yet there were some similarities. I have come to be grateful for Beverly's lifestory because she added a quality to mine that I needed.

The date was dinner at her home in Vale in company with Verne, a girlfriend, Beverly, and her family. I had arranged to fly from Boise ~~back~~ to Oakland the next day, thus gracefully escaping any extension of social commitment if the blind date turned out poorly.

Bells didn't ring in my ears and shooting stars didn't zing across the periphery of my vision when we met, but, before the evening was over, I knew that this was the girl I wanted to marry. I had considered marriage with a couple of other girls before, but it had lacked that inner knowing of rightness that came to me now. Beverly is tall, slender, and

artistic in a quiet, self-contained way. She was completely casual with me on the evening of our first meeting. There was nothing about her manner either to encourage or discourage me. I liked the fact that I wasn't quite sure at first where I stood with her.

After dinner we went to a New Year's dance with several other couples. We were never alone that evening, and our conversational exchanges were always in the presence of others; yet when we said goodbye I knew I wanted to see her again. I wrote to her from Oakland, thanking her for the evening and asking if I might correspond with her. She didn't answer immediately as some girls might. Just when I was beginning to think she was not going to answer at all, she responded graciously.

Our courtship was a bit unusual in that we were not together very many times before we were married. I visited her in Arco the next spring when I was invited back to be the high school commencement speaker for my sister's graduation. We had several dates at that time. She was planning to spend the summer in Europe with two girlfriends, and we agreed to keep in touch. Letters were frequent, and at the end of that summer she came to California for a few days. We did not see each other after that until Christmas, and again I went to Arco. This time Beverly did not go to Vale but remained in Arco for the holidays because I was there. We knew now that we loved each other. In the spring of 1964 I asked her to marry me, she accepted, and we set the date for August 22.

We chose to be married in the Baptist Church in Arco, the place where Beverly had taught school for two years and the place where many of my significant life events had taken place. Four carloads of people from my church in Oakland (I had now become the pastor) drove the distance of 1600 miles roundtrip and joined with people who had known me all my life to witness the wedding. Our ceremony was not only a commitment to each other but also a commitment to a shared life in the ministry. Beverly told me later a girlhood dream had been to be a minister's wife. We took a honeymoon trip up into the Canadian Rockies and returned to Oakland in September, where the church thrilled and surprised us with a gift of money to be used as a downpayment on our own home.

Finding our home is a kind of miracle story in itself. One day, several months before our marriage, a woman called on the phone and said she was thinking of selling her home and understood from a neighbor and member of my church that I might be interested in buying. I lacked the capital to make a downpayment on anything at the time, but something in her invitation prompted us to go look at the home anyway. Beverly was visiting at the time.

It was tucked away in the Oakland hills, a modest but sturdy little house on a gorgeous and generous piece of land that afforded a panoramic view of the Bay Area from Richmond to San Jose. Framed by huge oaks and firs, with delightful nooks and patios that invited rest and meditation, it was everything I had ever wanted in a home -- a touch

of rural wilderness in the middle of a city.

Mrs. Garnick, the owner, knew about the forthcoming gift of money from the church coming to us when we married, which we did not. She also wanted us to have her home because she knew we loved it as much as she. When I demurred about the price (which was remarkably low) she reduced it by a thousand. When I admitted I didn't know where I'd get enough for a downpayment, she made vague intimations about working it out for us. When I said we couldn't afford furniture right away, she offered to let many of her things go with the house. I think God meant for us to have that home, and no obstacle could stand in the way. The day before I left to go to Arco for my wedding,I signed the loan agreement with the bank that made the home ours.

Both Beverly and I feel we were given divine guidance to marry. My guidance was just an expansion of the feeling I had the first evening I saw her. I knew then that she was right for me and that feeling never left. Her guidance came much more dramatically ~~when~~ one night, almost a year after our meeting, when she was in bed, she heard the words, "You will marry Rod." She didn't tell me about it until after we were married because she, like me, had to learn to trust such an experience.

We have not had children, not because they were not wanted, but just because they have not come. This very fact, however, has made possible a deeper dimension of intimacy with each other. We have not been able to escape responsibilities to each other by hiding in our children, and we have been able to share in a freedom of activity and

travel that would not have been possible otherwise.

Many people have children for exclusively selfish reasons -- to see an extension of themselves, to have something on which to lavish their unfulfilled aspirations and affections, and because progeny are often seen as equivalent to the fulfillment of one's creative powers as a person. These motivations are basically wrong, and such people often make rather poor parents and end up wishing they had never had children. We would have accepted children as a gift from God and would have made every effort to be good stewards of such a trust, but since it has not happened, we have still led rich and full lives and have not really missed what we have not had.

I must add that I strongly believe in the right of people not to have children in this age when we are threatening to crowd each other off the globe, and I think we should stop encouraging the myth that personal fulfillment only comes as we reproduce ourselves in children. Moreover, many people are grossly unqualified to be parents and the world would be a lot better off if they would just realize it in time.

To speak of our marriage requires that I speak of it from the perspective of the ministry. There are churches who feel when they hire a minister they also hire his wife. With more and more women going into the ministry, this concept will inevitably be revised. It is neither realistic nor healthy to expect a woman to immerse herself in her husband's work, and I am certain it is not fulfilling for most women. Some of the unhappiest women I have known have been ministers' wives who felt the

congregation expected them to be what they are not.

Beverly and I are grateful for a church that, for the most part, carried no such expectations. Of course, I was a single man when the church decided to call me; so that may have helped. After we were married, she decided to continue teaching and was able to secure a position as homemaking teacher in a junior high school very close to our home. Though a few older members mumbled disagreeably about a minister's wife who worked, most people in the church did not care. I could only wish all ministers and ministers' wives could have the same loving, affectionate, and affirmative support of a congregation as we have had, for it has given our married life a special dimension both within and apart from the church.

To say what I really want to say about marriage I would have to say personally to Beverly; so I share this letter with you. Some of the words are borrowed from a contemporary wedding service I heard once, but even the best of words are inadequate vehicles of what I deeply feel:

> Dear Wife,
>
> For a brief movement of time we have decided to travel together through this earth valley, separate units yet called into a new existence together. Why have we chosen to do this? Because we have a unique and special love for each other which has become a whole new mode of life for us. I can only define this love as PRESENCE, being in this world for each other, interfused with each other in body, mind and spirit, yet always returning to our own private space to breathe and grow. That means we are <u>with</u> each other, not just <u>beside</u> each other.
>
> I must also define our love as the Presence of the Other who first led us together, and Who now lead us within, for it is this Higher Presence reflected in us that enables us to give Presence to

each other.

What do I like best about our marriage? I think I treasure most those last moments of each day, when the lights are out, and in the shelter of each other's arms we receive the feelings, thoughts and intentions of each other into ourselves in a silent communion where all the darkness of the universe is displaced by the little clearing of light our love has made, and where we communicate to each other the allness of ourselves rather than just words. It seems to me that the benediction of God, who created all things good, is resting upon us at that moment and making preparation for new openings and discoveries in our life together.

I do not know you fully, and I never will. Nor do I know myself fully. Yet the cloud of our unknowing has also become our morning-song of joy as we have moved on beyond the darkness of a nonpersonal world alone into the galaxies of light and warmth together where we find our aliveness.

I am not you and you are not I. We each have our own likes and dislikes, our own loves and fears. But being together has wakened within each of us a respect for what the other likes or dislikes. That respect has fashioned a deep center in life where we are truly at home.

By home I mean more than just a shelter of four walls, made beautiful by your arrangement of flowers or fragrant through the aroma of freshly-baked bread. I mean more than just the base from which we renew our experience as husband and wife. By home I mean the very experience of God our Creator who is showing us day by day what Presence means and what it means to be home for each other.

Someday our physical beings will separate, and we will walk this earth path no more. Yet I feel if that should happen tomorrow there would be a sense in which we would not cease to be together but would go on with each other into every new world, singing the new songs of the unexplored country. Such I feel is the love we have shared -- the love that is the throbbing of all ages and all time, the love of God who so valued this world that into its turmoil and its tranquility He sent you and me, and then brought us together, that through us and our shared love the world might also be loved.

Your Husband

CHAPTER XX

LET MY PEOPLE GO

One of the most difficult problems I have had to struggle with in the church is the issue of race. At the same time, pastoring a congregation that is comprised of different ethnic varieties and living in a community with the wide racial diversity of Oakland have been two of the richest privileges of my lifetime. I am convinced today that if America is going to free herself of the evil of racism that is bred so deeply into the origins and patterns of her life as a nation, it will only be as the Christian church is willing to effect a theology of race that accepts all people for what they are and ever works to grant equal rights and privileges to everyone.

Fortunately I was never inflicted with the disease of racial prejudice as deeply as were many other whites I know, although I am convinced that each of us has a little of it hidden somewhere. The white woman who said to me, "I just love black people; after a while I even forget they are black," is probably covering up more racism than she cares to admit by her implication that forgetting a person's blackness is the one way she can love them.

As a child I was never deliberately taught to regard any race as inferior. The truth is I was never taught much of anything about race because in rural Idaho there were almost no races to deal with besides

whites. I never personally knew anyone of another racial origin until I was out of high school, and this I regard as both a lack and an advantage. It was a lack in that I was deprived of the richness of variety in which the human family comes; it was an advantage in that I didn't have to cure myself of a bigotry learned at any early age.

Near Blackfoot, about sixty miles from Arco, the Fort Hall Indian Reservation where lived members of the Bannack and Shoshoni tribes. Every year various groups of these Indians would travel through Lost River Valley selling buckskin gloves and beaded moccasins, and they never failed to stop to see my grandfather. He had been an agent on the Crow Agency in Montana and carried a lifelong admiration and respect for these natives of North America which the Indians sensed.

I do remember that some ranchers would complain of thievery each time the Indians passed through, never realizing that this may have been one way the Indian could retaliate against the people that had robbed him of his dignity and freedom. I remember, too, that other stereotypes of Indians were presented, such as lazy, shiftless, inclined towards drunkenness; but one with any sense of discernment could understand from a careful and honest reading of history that the American Indian was one of the most noble and energetic races of people ever to dwell on earth. The injustice and dishonesty inflicted upon them by the white race will be a blot on our history forever, and one we have done little to ameliorate.

It was not until I was out of college and teaching school that I

encountered for myself the burdens under which black people live in America. In the summer of 1955 I went as a volunteer with the American Friends Service Committee (Quakers) to spend a summer in a village in a rural section of Mexico south of Mexico City. Among that group of fifteen volunteers were two blacks, a girl from Los Angeles and a young man from Alabama. Of all the people that I shared that summer with it is Arlene and Syl I remember best.

Arlene and I ended up as a cooking team for our group. Her sense of understanding and sensitivity towards the poor people of that little Mexican village were special endowments from one who has also struggled against poverty. She was a warm, giving person with an infectious humor that made that summer brighter for all of us, and one of those rare individuals who is able to meet and solve her problems without recrimination against others.

Syl was at the other end of the spectrum, and, because he was, he showed me how futile it is to draw racial stereotypes. He was intellectual, cold in his reserve, and aloof from any close relationship; yet he was so strikingly handsome and brilliant that people sought his friendship. I had an admiration for his mind and a sense of fondness for him that kept me working to penetrate his reserve, and I felt we did finally become friends.

When the summer was over, Syl and I traveled by bus back to El Paso where we were to separate to go home. When I walked into the bus depot with him, he turned to me and held out his hand to say goodbye.

"But we're staying here overnight," I protested. "I thought we wouldn't say goodbye until tomorrow."

Syl looked at me with a hard, mirthless smile. "Are you really that naive? Don't you realize we're back in the good old USA now? I can't even use the same restroom you use. What makes you think we could stay together?"

He saw that I looked bewildered and confused, and it must have angered him even more. "I suggest you take a trip through the South sometime and get your eyes opened, white boy. You've lived too long in a dream world."

With that he turned and walked away from me, and I knew with a deep sense of loss and hurt that Syl had not only found it impossible to be my friend, he hated me because of what I represented. My ignorance and naivete had only made a relationship more intolerable for him. I also knew that, though I would never see Syl again, it was going to be important for me to learn the reality of life as it was for him and his people if I ever hoped to move into their lives as a friend.

I made a continuous effort after that to understand life from the point of view of people of every race, and I learned wherever one people have outnumbered another, the dominant group usually becomes the oppressor of the minority. To my shame I was at last made aware of the cruelties my own people had consistently inflicted on those with darker skins, even though the law of life is that when you enslave another in any way you also enslave yourself.

When I came to Lakeshore in 1961 it was an all-white congregation in a changing neighborhood. Middle and upperclass black families were beginning to occupy large portions of the residential area that touched the church, brought about, said some whites acidly, by a deliberate real estate practice called "blockbusting." Most black people are Baptist by heritage, and most black people bear a relationship to the church that is held with seriousness and respect. It is because, through their long, tortured struggle, the church has been the one institution that afforded them dignity as persons. For a long time the black families moving into our neighborhood returned to their black churches to worship. Gradually, however, some of their children began to come to our church, and this opened the way for the parents also to attend. In a short time, led by their little ones, blacks began to join Lakeshore when they knew they were welcome.

The way had been prepared through the strong social preaching of Dr. George Phillips and Dr. Harold Geistweit whose ministries together spanned a half a century preceding mine. The congregation may have been all white for a hundred years, but a consistent stressing of the equality and dignity of all people had prepared the church for the inevitable change.

It was not all easy. Some whites became nervous and unsettled as more and more blacks came. "The church will soon be all black," was often muttered to me, and I would cheerfully reply, "Not as long as you and I are here."

Then came the passage of the Civil Rights Act by Congress in 1964, an important landmark in the history of race relations in America. But by now blacks were feeling the frustration of a hundred years that had not yet fully implemented the Emancipation Proclamation. The rise of the Black Power movement, the assassination of Martin Luther King, and the race riots that broke out in many major cities made integration no longer possible nor desirable for many blacks. Whites, who had taken tentative steps towards improving race relations, were left confused and uncertain, and the large majority of whites who didn't like blacks and didn't want equality for them became more firmly entrenched in their racist attitudes.

Perhaps my judgment was not the best at that point, but I was so convinced that racism was one of the greatest sins that I preached against it nearly every Sunday for a year. A number of white families left the church, and though none ever said to me it was because of the race issue, I am certain it was a major factor in their decision. I am willing to say now that perhaps I played the same record a little too often from the pulpit, but I also think if I had not remained consistently loyal in my vocal support of the black cause that we would have lost the ground we gained. We whites desperately needed to understand from the black perspective, and we needed blacks to help us make that understanding.

Remember that my experience in race relations was limited and that what I was feeling for blacks was a deep emotional empathy that was almost a ruling force in me. Given my place in life at that time and

the accumulation of my own life experiences, I did about as well as I could. If I made some mistakes, I did try to remain consistent in my expression of the fact that racism is a sin against God and against each other and one of the most limiting conditions we can impose upon ourselves or others. I still believe this is so.

I see the race crisis as fundamentally a problem of intergroup relations rather than interpersonal relations. I have watched individuals of various races overcome their differences simply by getting acquainted, but between groups there is usually more difficulty. Black and white young people in our church often like each other individually and yet remain within their own racial group for personal identity and social functions.

But while race is a sociological problem rather than a biological one, the solution is, nevertheless, theological. God in our hearts brings a new regard for ourselves and a new imperative to our relations with everyone. What matters most is that people of all races, especially blacks, accept themselves for what they are, expressing pride in their own racial identities even though it may involve handicaps or disadvantages. It is when we accept ourselves that we learn to accept others and give them the freedom to be what they are. This is the heart of the Great Law which Jesus said is loving God and each other as we love ourselves.

I see God's call to us today as parallel to the call that came through Moses to the Egyptian Pharaoh to "let my people go." Freeing

people from slavery is to let them go on to be what they most truly are, unfettered by our judgments or prejudices, with the same benefits of life available to them that are available to us. The place to start is with another individual. Syl started it for me, and hundreds more have helped, including people like my secretaries, Helen and Dorothy, black women who have kept me pushing on to a new integrity because of their own honesty with me, and people like Barry, a young man whose story could be duplicated by the thousands.

Barry is for me the tragic symbol of black youth caught in the vise of a racism he did not create and felt powerless to break. I baptized Barry, along with several of his friends, when he was eleven years old, but as Barry grew older he began to attend church less frequently. When he was there, he had a measured look, as though he was uncertain how much he could trust us. It made me rembmer the reserve of Syl and my inability to penetrate it. Then for a year or so I did not see Barry at all.

Early one morning Barry's mother called me and told me he had been arrested. "I want you to go see him," she said. "I want you to see what they have done to him."

Barry was in city jail on charges of inciting a riot, resisting arrest, and assaulting a police officer. I hardly recognized him at first. Both eyes were nearly swollen shut, there were lacerations and bruises on his face, and several front teeth were missing.

"Barry, what happened?" I asked over the telephone as I looked

at him through the glass partition that separated us.

He told me a little, but he was in too much pain to talk. He had been in jail for twelve hours and still had not been treated for his injuries. When I left him, I said, "Barry, don't let this destroy you," but the words sounded hollow.

From his parents and Barry I finally pieced together the facts of his arrest. Barry had taken his girl to a concert by a black rock artist, but though they had purchased tickets, they couldn't get in. A crowd had gathered on the outside of the auditorium and was protesting that the concert had been oversold. Barry and his girl were in the crowd. It was noisy and angry, but not unruly.

Suddenly they were surrounded by policemen from the riot squad ordering them to disperse. Barry sensed violence in the belligerent attitude of the police and the already angry mood of the crowd. He took his girl's arm and tried to steer her away. Simultaneously there was a lot of movement and confusion, and the riot squad moved in. Barry's girl became separated from him, and he began to search for her frantically, fighting his way through the crowd. By now the crowd and the riot squad had become violent, and there was much pushing and yelling.

Then one of the policemen yelled, "Get that nigger bastard in the white shirt," and several of them converged on Barry. He was clubbed on the head, struck viciously in the mouth, his shirt was ripped off, and he was beaten to the ground. His futile attempts at self-defense were interpreted as charges of assault and resisting arrest.

The case was finally settled out of court with some minor reductions in the charges, but the damage had been done. Barry began to walk a bitter road of hatred against the police and most whites. He joined the Black Panthers, the militant group that had its inception in Oakland and was made up of young blacks convinced that there would never be freedom for their people in a white society, and that the only way that society could be changed was through violence and revolution.

The bitter, violent attitude that characterized the Panthers did not last. Such an outlook is basically self-defeating, and gradually they eased into a less revolutionary, less confrontive stance against whites and began to work with their own people towards developing a sense of black pride.

Barry eventually dropped his participation with the organization and came back to his church, but something in him had crystallized forever, and rightly so -- he refused to be defeated by white supremacy. He is not different from many others of his race, whose bitter experience with white intolerance and arrogance has either beaten them down or made them rebellious and violent. When the doors for jobs, education, and housing are always shut in one's face because of skin color, it is difficult to love those who always shut those doors. When the laws seem to work against rather than for, it is hard to keep a respect for the law.

But fundamental to everything is a love and respect for one's own self. The new determination on the part of blacks to be proud of their blackness will ultimately bring them the full share in the life of

this nation and change things for all of us in America.

Indeed, it is already happening, although much too slowly. Chances are it would never have happened at all if it had been left to whites. Even well-meaning, love-all-people whites, ~~like~~ as I tried to be, would have plodded along for another two hundred years without forcing any drastic or permanent changes. It is the black people themselves who have forced us whites to "let them go" on to the freedoms that belong to them and all of us. If we can, in their own vernacular, all remain "cool" and be united in our desires to allow the full life for all people, in spite of the self-defeating methods of violence and hatred often used, we may make it yet towards becoming the single human family God has created us to be. One thing is sure -- few challenges facing us today are greater.

CHAPTER XXI

THE HEALING GIFT OF HUMOR

When God created humans He endowed them with a specifically human quality -- laughter. This gift was given to help divert the destructive side of our aggressions and to keep us honest with ourselves and each other. In these intensely serious and troubled days we desperately need a theology of humor that will create the bonds of unity and affection with each other that laughter specially provides.

Sometimes I think we need a sense of humor almost as much as we need a religion, or at least we need a religion that allows us to laugh. I don't know why when some people get a heavy dose of religion they usually stop being any fun. Once we get over the hurdle of seeing ourselves as wretched sinners and God as a merciless tyrant and begin to realize our own worth and His grace, we ought to be filled with such joy that it would keep us laughing most of the time.

G. K. Chesterton once advanced the notion that in the future religion will be based on a more highly developed form of humor because of its beneficial results. I hope he is right because I have found that a sense of humor is one of the strongest weapons we have against the constant ups and downs of life.

I'll always be grateful for the legacy of humor bequeathed to me by my family, especially my mother. She taught us to laugh, even

when things looked dark, and her own sparkling good nature eased us through many discouraging times. Most of all, she taught us not to take ourselves with such deadly seriousness that we became pompous or sanctimonious. She often regaled us with stories of the family that kept us in stitches, like the time when Uncle Grant ran the old Ford pick-up into the front porch, knocking off the supporting post and raising a welt on his head the size of an egg, and then hopped out and said with studied noncholance, "By God, just what I wanted to do." From there on when any of us would do some dumb, inexcusable thing, we would seek absolvance from it by saying, "Just what I wanted to do."

Families usually develop their own particular brand of humor from their life experiences. My mother and her family had the ability to meet all of life's difficulties with an undefeated wit, and I cherish this balancing force of humor as one of the richest gifts of life.

Of course, laughter like any gift, can be misused. Just as it creates bonds of social unity, it can also draw lines to make outsiders. When directed against one who is not a part of the "in" group, laughter becomes a cruel weapon. Any time it is used at the expense of another person it is a perversion of its basic nature.

Even as I write this, a hurtful memory surfaces from those early years in Arco following my parents' divorce when we were painfully poor. I was in the third grade and had received an invitation to a hobo party. It wasn't difficult to find a shabby old suit of clothes that I could dress up in to simulate a hobo, for though the clothes that my brothers and I

wore were always clean, they were usually patched and threadbare. It was at that party that one of the cruelest acts I had ever experienced took place.

One of the boys came up to me and remarked in a tone designed to be heard by all, "You were supposed to dress like a tramp. You look just like you always do."

The laughter that came from that roomful of children following his remark seared its way into my heart like a firebrand. I realize now that the cruelty of that moment was not deliberate but more a passive thoughtlessness on the part of those children who did not have the capacity to understand what life was like for each other. Still I was wounded deeply, and waiting until no one was looking, I slipped away.

Cutting my way through a deserted field along the river where I would meet no one, I hastened home to the only refuge I knew, not even admitting to myself the hurt I was carrying. I told myself that I didn't really care for those children and that it did not make any difference.

As I came into the house, I tried to hurry past my mother and my aunt into my room, but Mother called to me, "Didn't you go to the party?"

I hesitated, trying to decide if I should lie. "I went, but..." Then the tears welled up in my eyes and I could not go on.

Without a word she held out her arms to me and I climbed up on her lap. For a long time there was no sound but my childish sobs as

she held me gently. When I could finally tell her what had happened, she said, "They laughed at you without knowing how bad it would make you feel. They didn't really intend to be mean. And now you will always know never to laugh at anyone for any reason."

The truth of that lesson has been imperishable, for I see today the ridiculing of another human being as one of the most destructive things we can do, particularly when it is over something that cannot be helped. Because laughter can be perverted does not mean we should abandon it, however. Rather we need to cultivate it along the right lines so that all its inherent good can come forth.

In the early fervor of my Christian experience I tried to look on religion seriously, but I couldn't always do it with a straight face. We were taking Communion one Sunday in church. It was my first time, and I was anxious about what it meant and how to do it. Then Stuart, the preacher's son, sitting next to me, tipped the wee glass of grape juice to his lips, swallowed those few drops noisily and smacked his lips as though to order more. My grape juice had just started its descent, and Stuart's oral applause to that dainty serving amused me. I started to laugh, remembering too late that I should not, tried to repress it, and ended up choking on the juice and spraying it all over the pew rack in front of me.

There were five of us teen agers sitting together, and all five went immediately into paroxysms of giggling. The pew was literally bobbing up and down with our futile efforts to control it, and now and then some

repressed effort would burst forth in an explosive snort that reverberated all through the pious quiet of the church. Essie Drake, sitting right in front of us in an outrageous hat with a plume, turned and frowned reprovingly, but the waving of the plume only made things worse. My stomach was aching and my head swimming from trying to hold the laughter back. I even tried to think of something sad, like my own death, but even that seemed funny for some reason. Eventually we were no longer laughing over any incident but over the fact that we were laughing in a situation where laughter was not appropriate, and even that was funny.

A year or so after that, the minister, whose faith and confidence in me had not been seriously shaken by the event, invited me to preach the sermon on Sunday morning. This caught the fancy of the editor of the "Arco Advertiser," none other than my mentor of the speech contest days, former Governor Bottolfsen, and he printed in bold headlines: RODNEY ROMNEY FILLS PULPIT. A few days later some wag sent an anonymous note through the mail: "Dear Rod, What did you fill it with?" I never knew who sent it, but it is that sort of equalizing levity that keeps us from any undue sense of self-importance.

In my senior year in seminary a part of our training was to practice baptizing our classmates. With Baptists it's a little more complicated than with most other denominations because we insist on putting the person completely under the water and out again. We dignify this dunking practice by calling it immersion.

I was paired off that day with Stan. I stand 6'2" but Stan is a

bit taller and outweighs me. I was to baptize Stan first, and then he was to baptize me. I started out with Stan standing in front of me and to my left. I was planning to lower him, back first, into the water to my right. No one told me that he therefore should have been standing to my right rather than my left. After I had said the words I was supposed to say, I began to lower Stan into the water, but the reach was too far. As Stan began to go under the water, I felt my feet starting to slip, so I momentarily eased my hold on him to try to regain my own equilibrium. Stan had relaxed himself completely in my hands, as he had been told to do, but when he felt the supports removed, he kicked out with his feet, completely knocking me over and spraying water up out of the baptistry like a geyser. Both Stan and I went completely under; in fact, Stan went under twice. We came up spouting and coughing to the roars of our classmates who were more than a little water-spattered from their observation posts on a front pew. That day we did immersion and sprinkling all in one motion. As deeply meaningful as baptism remains for me, I seldom conduct it that I don't remember that one.

The late great C. Oscar Johnson was so appealing in his use of humor in the pulpit that skeptical and sophisticated ears, deafened to the usual sermon on morality, were often persuaded to hear what he had to say. After his retirement he taught a course at the seminary one semester on "Humor in the Pulpit," and I can still hear him say to us in his booming voice, "Put some windows in your sermons so people can get a breath of fresh air now and then. Otherwise, they'll fall asleep on

you."

Some of my best humor in the pulpit has not been contrived but has just grown out of a situation. There was the occasion I was to introduce Mr. Belchar, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, to make an announcement, and introduced him as Mr. Trustee, Chairman of the Board of Belchars. Another time I read the passage from Job, on Easter Sunday no less: "I know that my Redeemeth liver." I still hesitate each time I come to that scripture. Yet another time I quoted the words of Communion where Jesus took the cup after supper as, "After sup He took the cupper." Fortunately, the congregation at Lakeshore enjoys a good laugh now and then.

As I have said, to laugh at another person is cruel, and to laugh at a child is criminal. But children, in their innocent guile, have that wonderful capacity to stir us to humor. I met a little girl from our church school on the street one day, and she greeted me shyly, "Hi, Reveren' Ronny," and then as I passed I heard her remark to her friend, "He goes to my church." I still smile at the pure way she debased any self-importance I might have been indulging in.

Children also help us adults see ourselves more honestly by the way they often parody our world of pompous attitudes. A little miss in pigtails wandered out of our church's children's center one day, up the stairs into the office building, and perched herself at my desk where she began to work furiously at the typewriter keys.

As I walked in, I asked in some surprise, "Well, what's happening

here?"

She looked up fearlessly and answered, "Nuffins. Sit down an' I'll be wif you in a minute," and she went industriously back to her work. Haven't you been in situations where you felt someone's pretense at a task took precedence over you? What a delightful way to learn an important lesson.

One of the special gifts of laughter is that it diverts our aggressions and drains off our destructive impulses. I walked into the church sanctuary one afternoon and heard the gentle wheeze of someone snoring. I found an old fellow, reeking of alcohol, sound asleep on one of the pews. I woke him up with some uncharitable remark just ready to push its way forth, but he sat up, looked around, and then said in a distinctly reproving tone, "Say, do you know it's cold in here." He didn't mean it to be funny, but I couldn't help smiling,and the annoyance disappeared.

Humor is often subtle and effective in detecting dishonesty. Thus it exerts a great influence on the social behavior of humans, which means ultimately it also influences our moral behavior. As tragic as was the Watergate debacle in revealing the corruption in our government and as disspirited as it left the American people for a time, there was and is yet great good to come from it. It was my observance that the healers in that aftermath were not so much the moralists but the comedians on television and stage who helped us eventually laugh about it. When we can laugh, it is a sign we have begun the repair work on tragedy.

I read recently of a proposal to breed out the aggressive drive in humans by eugenic planning. Probably nothing could be more disastrous, for if we eliminate human aggression, we would also eliminate all the creative possibilities inherent in our aggression, as well as the antidote that keeps it from being destructive -- humor. There is an old adage that barking dogs may bite but laughing men rarely shoot.

Cultural tradition is making humor more respected as we recognize its ability to drain off our destructive impulses, to create special bonds of social unity, and to save us from succumbing to some flattering delusion about ourselves. As such, humor is a powerful ally of the gospel. I like to think that God shared this special gift with us so that even on the darkest days we would have the healing perspective of the lighter side.

CHAPTER XXII

A LITTLE LESS BRIMSTONE, PLEASE

There are several particularly aggressive species of tropical fish, such as the East Indian yellow cichlid and the Brazilian mother-of-pearl, who must have another fish of the same sex around on which to vent their hostilities or they will kill their mates. The situation in aquariums is obviated by leaving a "scapegoat" fish in the tank against which the aggressive fish can discharge its anger and thus not tear its own mate to ribbons or destroy its young.

The term "scapegoat" arises from a religious ceremony of ancient Judaism when, on the Day of Atonement, the sins and impurities of the people would be unloaded on a goat. The poor animal would then be driven into the wilderness to die. Though the ceremony had temporary psychological value for superstitious and primitive people by allowing them to feel they were free for a while, we would laugh at the notion of doing this today. Yet scapegoating has continued with us into the twentieth century, most notably in the belief in an evil power or force that controls us and makes us do bad things. A sincere but misguided young man who always came late to church would say to me, "I wish you'd pray for the devil to let go of me so I can get here on time. He's always making me late."

"Have you tried getting up a little earlier?" I asked.

"Wouldn't do any good," he answered. "The devil would get me one way or the other." It's nice to be able to shuck one's personal responsibilities off on a mythical devil, but it's hardly honest.

Several years ago I was exposed to the writings of Joel Goldsmith, one who sought truth in all religions and philosophies, whose thinking is based entirely on the idea that there is only one power in this universe, and that power is God. Goldsmith forced me to make a decision about whether or not there were other powers apart from God, and I finally decided that, since God is the life of all being, there can be no power in effect that is separate from God. Having made that decision, all other powers save God ceased to exist for me, and the following ideas slowly grew to formation within me.

Few things probably stunt religious growth more than a belief in a devil. Those who have studied it claim that the teaching of a devil as a personality was introduced by church leaders long after the time of Jesus Christ as a weapon to keep people in line. The apparition presented was that of a man with horns and a long, forked tail. True, the word "devil" is in the Bible, but with a quite different meaning than we often hear today. The Greek and Latin words, from which the word "devil" originates, mean literally the slanderer, the deceiver, or the deluder. It was a symbolic term for everything that opposed the perfect plan of God. The word "Satan," which occurs in both the Old and New Testaments, means adversary, but was generally used allegorically as the adversary within humans that opposes and denies their right re-

lationship to God. Jesus once called a group of Scribes and Pharisees "children of the devil" because they were under the delusion that their material existence was their only reality. The devil as a person was created by the limited understanding of humans who misued their own powers and failed to realize their potential oneness with God. Buddha said that sin is the result of ignorance, and we might also say that the devil is the result of ignorance as to who God is and what we as God's children can be. Anything can be misused -- laughter, love, even faith. Faith in a personal devil is a misuse of faith. If God is all-power, and if our faith is in the all-power of God, there is no room for faith in a devil.

If we don't have a devil, what are we going to do about hell? Hell is another term that has caused much confusion. As a child I was told that hell is down, and heaven is up. Later as I achieved some scientific awareness of the fact that the globe I am on is spinning around in space, it was difficult to know whether I was on the top or the bottom. I was also taught that hell is reserved for the sinner, the people who do not belong to a church, or who belong to the wrong church, or who do all the bad things they are not supposed to do. I found this incredibly contradictory to the notion of a God of Love who had the power to create but apparently now the power to save. I also found it inconsistent with much of the Bible.

In one of the few religious conversations I ever had with my father I asked him if he could ever condemn one of his sons to hell.

He replied, "Of course not."

"Then," I puzzled, "it bothers me that God could do it." To which my father merely shrugged his shoulders. Obviously it was more than he could decide.

Many years later I decided God couldn't do it either, any more than could an earthly father who loved his children. In fact, I would have found it impossible to follow God if I had not established some alternative to the traditional doctrines of divine wrath and eternal punishment. It is true there are plenty of texts in the New Testament to shore up the cause for believing in hell and damnation, and I've read every one of them a good many times. My conclusion is that we don't really go deep enough into the inner meaning of these texts to understand them, and we don't read them alongside other passages that present a different picture.

The word "hell" was translated from the word "Gehenna" which was the name of a valley south of Jerusalem, a garbage dump for the city where a fire was always kept going for the sake of sanitation. I think the Bible is trying to teach us in purely allegorical terms that God is a consuming fire, but a fire that purifies rather than destroys. If God is all good, then His good consumes evil, just as light consumes darkness. I see hell then, not as some place we go after we die to burn eternally for our mistakes and unconfessed sins, but rather a fire that always takes place in us to purify the spirit implanted within. It is that fire which purges us of our sins and restores us to our original

divine image. I cannot see where the old literalistic notions of fire and brimstone as methods of punishment after death ever did much to get people to feel anything for God except fear. Fear is hardly a foundation for faith. I don't argue that there is no hell, but I argue it is a state of consciousness when we are separated from God and not a place where we go for what we did or did not believe.

Once in a sermon I alluded to my growing convictions along these lines, and a woman remarked afterwards, "What's the matter with him? Has he lost his mind?"

To which a more progressive soul dared to reply, "No, he just lost his hell."

What then happens to us when we die? Do we all go to the same place? The best I know seems to affirm that the next world is probably all around us here, and the so-called dead carry on their lives right where we are now but in their own world and in their own way. They are on different wave lengths than we or on one of the many etheric planes that go into infinity, all interpenetrating one another. On this earth plane we know only three dimensions, with occasional glimpses into the fourth and sometimes beyond. Heaven is not a place of the fourth dimension, I think, but rather a state of infinite dimension, a state which Jesus told us we could begin to experience here and now. On this level we live in a transcended, harmonious relationship to God and all of life. We may not meet God any more fully on the next plane than we do on this one, because God is everywhere, as fully present here as there.

It all depends upon the degree to which we have allowed our spiritual consciousness to be opened to God while we are on this plane.

There are, I suspect, a few unpleasant localities in the next world where the evil doers must go, not for punishment, but to learn and be reformed. No one sends us anywhere; we go the natural surroundings of our own spiritual condition. No one determines how much we shall be punished or when the punishment will cease; we determine that.

But if there is neither an eternal place of punishment or reward, then what? For a number of years now I have accepted the fact that part of our preparation for spiritual oneness with God may necessitate coming back to earth in another human body and trying again. Many orthodox Christians find such notions unreasonable and abhorrent. While it is certainly not provable, it is to me quite plausible and explains a number of things to me that otherwise are unexplainable. I considered passing over this whole matter entirely because of its controversial nature, but I decided that an honest sharing of myself could not be done by ignoring what has been deeply verified in me as being true. Most of my Christian associates who brand me as a heretic for accepting any belief in reincarnation claim there is not a shred of evidence for it in the New Testament. I cannot regard this as so, and, even if the scriptures are not explicit on this matter, there is nothing in reincarnation to contradict the essential teaching of Jesus Christ. Actually there are a number of texts (John 9:2, Mark 6: 15, Matthew 16:14, Luke 9: 8-9, Matthew 17:9-13, Mark 9:11ff.) which

indicate that reincarnation was an accepted Jewish belief, and we do not ever find Jesus refuting or challenging it. Rather he seemed to accept it. I can find nothing in such a belief out of harmony with His teachings, for, if I did, I would seriously have to reconsider it.

My belief in reincarnation grew out of trying to answer several important questions for myself? If there is no place of eternal punishment like hell, what happens to the evil doer? If God is just, why does He allow inequities to exist in this world, such as people coming here with physical and mental defects, into unfortunate environments, with different capacities to love and hate, as well as with a predisposition towards other personality traits? As I began to ask these questions, there came to me, through what seemed to be the natural course of events, certain people and books on the whole scope of reincarnation. There is an old eastern proverb that says when the student is ready the teacher appears. It has certainly been true for me. At first I rejected the notion of reincarnation as totally unthinkable; yet I was drawn more and more to study it and discovered that not only has the idea been held tenaciously since the sixth century B.C. by hundreds of millions of scholars and mystics but that it is also believed today by many Christians.

In the summer of 1966 I attended a church conference at the American Baptist Conference Grounds at Green Lake, Wisconsin, and in that most unlikely spot the idea began to take firm root within me. Late one night I sat reading a book about Edgar Cayce, a devout Christian who lived in the first half of this century and who shocked even

himself by penetrating the barriers of time and space while in a hypnotic state. In this state he was able to perform fantastic cures and advance prophecies and ideas which his waking mind could not even accept. Among other things, Cayce received the knowledge of life as eternal before birth as well as after death and of the human soul living through many incarnations on this earth in its quest of spiritual perfection. (I might add that this book about Cayce had been delivered to me one day by a radio listener of mine who said, "I've been listening to you for several years, and I think you're ready for this.")

As read the final words of that book and sat listening to the wind roar off the lake through the branches of the big trees in front of the Roger Williams Inn, I was aware that all the tradition surrounding me at that moment would deny what I had just read. But I could not deny it. "God," I prayed, "can any of this be true?" And the answer welling within me said, "Yes!" I lay awake most of that night, too stirred to sleep.

The next morning at breakfast I found myself seated (by chance?) next to Roscoe Earl, a minister from Montana, who had grown up in Arco and had known me since my infancy. Roscoe was a risky candidate for a conversation on reincarnation, but I was too full to hold it back; so I cautiously told him what I had finished reading the night before, and then said, "You know, I can't help but wonder if reincarnation might not be true."

Roscoe looked at me and said, "I've wondered the same thing for

a long time."

I nearly fell off my chair. It was like a needed confirmation from an old and trusted friend to go ahead and explore. For several years after that I read avidly and pursued the trail of any respectable reincarnationist I could find. I did it all quietly for such pursuits are not usually endorsed in Baptist circles, but within a short time I accepted the belief fully. Rather than feeling any tension with the Christian faith because of it, I only felt a growing sense of liberation and a confirming of what Jesus was and taught.

Jesus Christ adds the dimension to the doctrine of reincarnation that eastern religions do not have: that when we come into a life of faith and trust in Him we "pass from death unto life;" we are off the wheel of life and death forever and can move to the next dimension. We do not have to come back again, but we may be allowed to do so if we can do something to help the path of progress here or if we still have lessons to learn at this level. When Jesus told Nicodemus that he would have to be born again, He may have meant that it would take at least another incarnation for him to find eternal life and the kingdom of God. Or He may have simply meant that he needed a spiritual rebirth from within. But when He said at the grave of Lazarus, "Whoever lives and believes in me shall never die," He meant just that -- we no longer need go through the cycles of birth and death on this earth plane, but in Him we can go on to a new assignment and a higher sphere. That sphere could be here or elsewhere -- it matters not. What matters is our eternal life in Him.

So many things have thus been explained to me: the progress of the human race to greater heights of knowledge and achievement, the different levels of capacities and endowments within each individual life, the sense of relatedness we often feel to certain places, people, or circumstances which we have not encountered before. However, I have never felt strongly compelled to teach the doctrine of reincarnation or try to force it on anyone. (As if I could!) Believing in it or not believing in it does not change any of the essentials that we must do. The same imperatives are still before us. A psychic once gave me a reading on some of my past lives; I found it interesting, but it did not change or obviate any of the responsibilities I was facing as a moral being in this life. I have occasionally seen people get so caught up reliving past lives that they fail to deal adequately with this one. It is too bad they have not put their learning to a better use.

Some people argue that under my notions the incentive to improve one's self and the need for a Saviour is removed. I hope I have been able to show that there is an even greater need for both. We cannot leave anything half-finished or undone because somewhere and sometime we will be faced with the necessity for completion. We can't even escape by suicide, for we take with us into the next world and the next life everything we have been in this one. Knowing I must handle my life and its problems responsibly <u>now</u> places me in a different position than if I thought death or God's last judgment were the final determinants. This is where I need Jesus Christ whose strength and power enable me to

fulfill the highest law of life, the Law of Love, and thus to bring my life to fulfillment on this earth so that I may go on to the next.

Some people would also argue that this all sounds like pure universalism, the doctrine which says that every soul shall ultimately be saved. So is the notion of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, seeking the lost sheep until He finds every last one of them, pure universalism. So is Paul's claim that the love and power of Christ is so great "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess He is Lord to the glory of God the Father," (Philippians 2:10-11) and that "in Him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven" (Colossians 1:19-20).

I cannot expect anyone to believe as I do, but I can expect the right to share a little of what I believe and why. I haven't offered any final answers because I don't think there are any. Truth, for me, is an unfolding process, not a body of fixed ideas. My truth at this moment tells me that all our concepts of God, life, and afterlife are too small for the reality, but I must keep going on with what I have because it's all I have for now. Meanwhile, I can only trust in God's infinite mercy to forgive my mistakes of deed and thought, while I continue my pilgrim's progress to that time and place where I cease to live by hearsay and faith and begin to walk by sight.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE WAY FARTHEST OUT

In the early years of my ministry I saw and experienced a miracle. I prayed for someone who was critically ill and who was expected to die, and she got well. It was a miracle of no large consequence to many people, but it created a new heaven and earth for me, for it showed me a world larger than any my previous views had permitted.

Late one evening at home the phone rang, not an uncommon event in a minister's household. The caller was a nurse from one of the local hospitals who was also a listener to my radio broadcast. She explained to me that a young mother in that hospital was dying and that her husband was in desperate need of spiritual counsel. Would I come and talk to him?

I was there within the hour, feeling even before I met him a sense of kinship and concern as I thought of my own wife who provided me with much-needed companionship and support. He was waiting for me in the foyer, and we walked into the hospital chapel where I gently began to talk with him about this crisis he was facing. I hoped to help him come to a sense of acceptance about his wife's imminent death, for I had no reason to doubt that she was dying or the nurse would not have said so.

But as I began to talk, he put his head down and began to sob, "I can't give her up. Please, not now. She is everything to us. We

have two little boys. What will they do? What will I do?"

I put my hand on his shaking shoulders. "Let's pray about it," I suggested. "Let's see if we can understand what it is that God wants."

He quieted, and, as I waited a moment in silence, I felt a warm prickly sensation across the back of my neck and a stabbing wave of compassion for the suffering of this man that brought the sting of tears to my eyes. Then as I began to pray, I heard myself saying, "Lord, heal this man's wife. Give her back to him and their children, whole and well, just as you gave her to them in the first place. Let their lives go on together on this earth in an even more beautiful way. Thank you for doing this." Then I stopped in astonishment and confusion as I realized what I had prayed. That prayer had literally been prayed through me by some source beyond myself, or so it seemed.

He was no longer crying but looking at me through shining eyes, a beautiful expression lighting his features. "I feel so much better," he said. "Will you go up and see her now?"

We went to the Intensive Care Unit, and, when I saw her, I was appalled that I had asked for her healing. She was unconscious, gasping in deep, heaving breaths, and on her face was the look of death that soon becomes recognizable after you have seen it a few times. The nurse had said pnuemonia had set in, that she had lapsed into a coma yesterday, and that all vital signs were steadily weakening. Medication had been stopped because she was not responding to it anyway. Downstairs I had

just prayed for this woman to live. If I had seen her before I prayed, I would never have been able to ask for her healing, for every sign told me she would die within a few hours.

I left the hospital with a sense of failure for having led that husband to a false sense of hope. Why had I not helped him face the death of his wife instead of nurturing the ungrounded belief that she would live? I remembered the anger of a father who had prayed for his son, hurt in an accident, and then had watched him die, and had said to me bitterly, "Religion always promises more than it delivers." Had I done that?

Early the next morning I called the hospital, half expecting they would tell me that the woman had expired, but the nurse who had called me the night before took my call and said in a jubilant voice, "She's much better. Sometime during the night she began to show signs of improvement. All the vital signs are stabilized now and she is resting quietly. We don't know what happened, but she is definitely better." I hung up the phone and knelt right then and there and asked God to continue what had been started, in spite of my weak faith.

The next day I went to see her. She was conscious and smiled weakly as I told her I had been praying for her and believed she was going to get well. In a few days she was out of intensive care. I visited her two more times before she went home. The last time I was there, I met her doctor and a cadre of medical interns from the UC Medical Center in San Francisco.

"We are studying this case," said the doctor, "because of its strange and unusual nature. We were never able to make a proper diagnosis of the illness; so we were never able to prescribe treatment. We tried a few things, but she made no positive response to anything; yet when we ceased giving her any medication, she began to recover. We don't know what made her ill, and we don't know what made her well."

"Doctor," I said, "I think she's had a miracle."

"Oh, no doubt about it," he said.

I learned later he was Jewish. Our ideas of miracles may have been slightly different, but we both knew we were in touch with the unexplainable. I define a miracle as any occurrence in nature that calls our attention to the One above nature. I had a feeling he would have agreed.

Shortly afterwards the woman went home to her family, and as far as I know, she is alive and well today.

I tell this story to share with you a moment in time when something began to change for me -- my whole concept of prayer. I had been a follower of Jesus Christ for years before I really began to understand prayer. How I must have wearied and bored God (if the Divine has capacity for such) through those years when I laboriously recited, implored, informed, and beseeched! I knew prayer was talking to God, but I thought that meant telling God what was going on and begging for a few changes. The only thing, I did most of the talking. I seldom gave God a chance to say anything to me.

In 1960, when I was preparing to leave for Europe, I searched around for a devotional book I could take with me that would remind me to pray. I had never been very steady with prayer, but I had always hoped to be. A seminary friend told me that he had just read a book called I Will Lift Up Mine Eyes, by Glenn Clark, and it had been helpful to him. On the strength of his recommendation, I bought the book and took it with me to Europe.

For several months I didn't open the book. Then one evening I picked it up and began reading. This is not just a book to read, however; it is a book to be experienced and tried. It begins with a series of studies in prayer which are to be taken in conjunction with a notebook assignment each day. I wasn't quite that serious about prayer, and in a short while I tossed the book aside as the most ridiculous approach to prayer I had ever heard. Imagine writing down your hopes and dreams and then expecting them to come true and calling it prayer!

But I could not leave Glenn Clark alone, and his book came back into my hands off and on all through that year. It was his challenge that our dreams, the sincere desires of our souls, are planted there by God and that the realization of those dreams is the fulfillment of God's will for us. I was finally impelled to write down three things that I wanted and submit them to the test he suggests. If the list can survive the application of the test, then we know that these are the desires of our soul, and hence, the desires of God, rather than the desires of our selfish, undisciplined egos.

I wrote down these things as my strongest desire at that time: (1) a meaningful life work; (2) a wife with whom to share the deepest adventures of life; (3) a home with a view of the Bay Area. The last one was loaded because it was delineating where I wanted my work and wife to be, but it survived the test. Glenn Clark suggests that asking for a home is not wrong and even asking for a beautiful home is not wrong as long as it meets the requirements of the test. A home was especially important to me because I had never really had one that I felt was mine, even as a child.

Basically the test that Glenn Clark suggests is to follow the pattern of Philippians 4:8, "whatever is true, honorable, pure, just, lovely, gracious, excellent, and worthy of praise," but it is much more involved than that, and I suggest if you are interested in the details that you read his book.

The constant stress of Glenn Clark in all his writings is that true prayer is not asking; it is giving. It is giving one's self over to God in absolute trust that His highest will for our absolute good will return to us. I played at this idea off and on for several years, but never very seriously until after I came to Lakeshore. There I met some people who were involved in Camps Farthest Out, the lay movement founded by Glenn Clark in Minnesota in 1930, which is a united attempt to go farther out with Jesus Christ in an atmosphere of love and acceptance, to explore the naturalness and power of prayer. Made up of Christians of every denomination and sect, CFO reaches around the

world with the message of Jesus Christ as Glenn Clark interpreted it and saw it applied to life. This entire concept, including the daily routines of the camps, was part of a vision given to Glenn of what could happen if people would draw apart from the routine of life and concentrate on prayer as Jesus used and taught it.

I never met Glenn Clark for he graduated to the other side on August 26, 1956 before I had even heard of him; but I have certainly met the spirit of that man in the pages of his books and in the followers of the CFO Movement. I would never have dared pray for that woman's healing that night in the hospital had it not been for what Glenn Clark taught me, for it was through his interpretation of the message of Jesus that I learned the reality of the Kingdom of Heaven as an experience for today which is produced through the right uses of prayer. In CFO I have seen the dynamic of Christ Love at work, filling the hearts of people, dissolving their religious barriers and human differences, and healing their limitations and illnesses. For the past ten years I have been involved as a speaker in the CFO camps and retreats as my time would allow, and each one has been a rich and meaningful experience. I do not share this for any promotional purposes, for I am under no delusion that CFO would appeal to everyone. I am only trying to let you know what helped bring me into an experience of prayer which has become for me the experience of Life itself.

As you know, if you have read the previous pages of my life-story, the three things I wrote on that list came to me within a few years

of the time I asked for them: a meaningful life work, the "right" wife, and a home with a view of the San Francisco Bay Area. They did not come all at once, but they came in just the order I listed them and right down to every detail.

I began this chapter sharing the story of a healing in which prayer was the channel. The subject of prayer and healing requires much more attention than I can give it here, for obviously not every prayer produces healing in the way we request. I have prayed for people to live and have watched them die; yet their passing always left me with a sense of peace as I came to know that death is the Ultimate Healing. I have prayed for people to get well, and they have remained ill. Sometimes I could ascertain what was blocking the healing; sometimes I could not. I have also had that marvelous joy repeated of praying for people and watching them recover miraculously. We are dealing here with a mystery about which there is much yet to learn. The healing of our bodies is not God's highest will for us, however, and it is not always possible to be physically healed for reasons not always clear to us. Our deepest need is for God. Physical healing is one of the gifts of God which we may seek, but we must always prefer the larger gift of God Himself even apart from all of His gifts. Otherwise, healing becomes a false god.

In 1975 at a conference on Healing sponsored by the University of California, I listened to Dr. Carl Simonton, a radiation therapist in private practice in Fort Worth, Texas, describe his method of treating cancer patients by training them to use a form of meditation that visual-

izes the healing of their cancerous cells. The results are startling! With 70% of the patients on which he has used this treatment, some of them in the last stages, there have been positive results. In that same conference I heard Dr. Norman Shealy, neurosurgeon and Director of the Pain Rehabilitation Center of LaCrosse, Wisconsin, present the meditation he prescribes to patients with chronic pain problems. His method of autogenic healing (self healing) has had amazing results of freeing people from pain. While Shealy believes that you cannot be truly healthy without a belief in the Divine, he also feels that most organized religion has been too negative to keep us healthy. These men are typical of many in the medical field who are beginning to attempt a more wholistic approach to medical healing. Whether they admit to it or not, they are using the methods of Jesus who told us we would be healed according to our faith. The mind is such a powerful instrument it can create its own conditions of sickness or health. Prayers or meditations for healing are mental attempts to create health, and even the medical world recognizes the validity of these attempts.

Prayer for me is but a response to the summons of God. It is not the opening of my lips but the opening of my soul. It is not what I say but what I am. As someone has said, "Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance; it is laying hold of God's willingness." It never fails that when I go to Him with an open, receptive heart I always experience an infilling of His peace and power. If I keep an appointment with God faithfully each day, taking time to wait for His blessing

and listen for His guidance, the difference in the way I live that day and the energy that is supplied is startling. Better than a narcotic for easing pain, more reliable than a stimulant for producing exhilaration, more efficient than a doctor for analyzing emotional disorders and motives, more effective than a tranquilizer for overcoming stress, and more accurate than any astrological guide for giving direction -- this is prayer. If more people knew what prayer could do when rightly understood and rightly used, we would become a people of prayer, and the world of peace and humanhood would be here.

CHAPTER XXIV

SPEAKING IN TONGUES

I think I once heard a woman speak in tongues when I was sixteen. It was at a prayer meeting in a country farmhouse near Arco with about seven people present. Beulah Watkins got down on her knees behind the stove and began to rock back and forth, making strange clicking sounds in her throat of nondistinguishable words and syllables. She got so carried away that she bumped into the chimney and disconnected it from the stove, and the room quickly filled up with smoke. We had to stop praying and put the stove back together. The original experience of speaking in tongues by the disciples of Jesus on the day of Pentecost brought down tongues of flame, according to the second chapter of the Book of Acts. Beulah's experience didn't generate flames, just a little smoke, but the episode left me intensely uncomfortable. Beulah spoke in tongues, I was told, because she was a member of some Pentecostal denomination, a hyper-emotional sect that did that sort of thing with frequency; otherwise, tongues-speaking in mainstream Christianity was practically non-existent.

During the 1960's, speaking in tongues became a part of the spiritual activity of many major denominations in the United States. Some thought it heralded the return of a true religion. Organized religion seemed then to have grown cold, intellectual, sterile, and ritual-

ized. The New Testament phenomenon of glossalalia, or speaking in tongues, seemed to inject feeling and emotion into many churches that had almost lost contact with feeling and emotion. However, it also brought division and rupture into more than one community of faith, with congregations divided between those who insisted on incorporating tongues-speaking into the worship and those who found the practice abhorrent. From my perspective, the revival of glossalalia was more a curse than a blessing.

Prior to a few years ago I was more interested in keeping away from the experience than I was in being exposed to it. I gave a wide berth to any individual or group that spoke in tongues. I avoided the experience because I mistrusted it as being authentic. I found it difficult to believe that a genuine activity of the Holy Spirit would produce divisive, negative results, or make people do ridiculous things. I labelled it as a self-induced, ecstatic state, indulged in by only highly suggestible individuals. Because it seemed to me to be only an "emotional high" with all the rational element removed, I wanted nothing to do with it. God must have thought I needed to relax my intolerant attitude, however, because He landed me in the middle of a camp of several hundred people in the summer of 1973 who were so busy speaking in tongues they hardly had time for anything else.

The other speaker, sharing the leadership with me at that camp, had received the gift of tongues a year earlier. It had made a dramatic change in his life and had also brought a physical healing to him.

Consequently, he had an overwhelming urge to share this with everyone. The first night he spoke, he invited people to come forward who already knew how to speak in tongues, that is, those who had previously received the gift. (The New Testament labels glossalalia as a gift of the Holy Spirit, and much is made over the fact that it is given, not self-induced.) At his invitation, three-fourths of the people made their way down to the front of that crude, wooden chapel. He lifted his hands above their heads and began to pray aloud in words that sounded a little like my New Testament Greek lessons. A gentle wave of sound rose from the throats of the people. At first it sounded like a babble, but as it increased in volume, it seemed to flow into a kind of melodious chant which was not at all unpleasant to hear. This was much better than Beulah Watkins, and I leaned forward, somewhat intrigued.

After several minutes of this, the speaker, who seemed able to control the duration and force of the sound, lifted his hands for silence and then invited all who would now like to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit to come forward and join the group assembled in front. Except for about twenty-five persons, the remaining members of the audience went forward. As I felt the lines of exclusion being drawn around us who supposedly did not have the Holy Spirit, I began to feel hostility for the whole procedure. Those of us who were left in the audience were obviously spiritually impoverished and inferior. Whatever our version of the Holy Spirit, it was inadequate in that setting.

The sounds in the front of the room had commenced again with re-

newed vigor and enthusiasm. The "converts" were placed in the center where others could lay hands on them. Some of the people knelt, lifting up their hands into the air, swaying back and forth with eyes closed; shortly it appeared that some had even fainted. (I learned later this is called "being slain in the Spirit" and is much to be desired because it represents a total takeover by the Spirit; as one person explained to me, "When God zaps you, He zaps you real good.") I heard one girl yell, "O my God, I've got it, I've got it!" Her voice then rose in what sounded more like coyote yelps than anything else. The ridiculous line from the musical, "My Fair Lady," popped into my mind, "She's got it, she's got it; by Jove, I think she's got it." After nearly half an hour of this, I got up and left the meeting.

Walking back to my cabin I wondered how I would be able to go through the rest of the week as a speaking leader in such a hyper-emotional atmosphere? I wondered if I should leave the camp and go home, since there seemed to be nothing that I could contribute towards the religious experience that most of the people there seemed to want.

The next morning after breakfast I decided to draw apart and be alone for a private period of prayer and decision. I followed a canyon trail out of camp to a series of small waterfalls. There in isolation from all human voices, in the presence of God's unmarred splendor, I sat down with my back against a tree to listen for the still, small voice that I had learned to trust. I had brought my Bible, because, in the light of last night's experience, I wanted to read again

what the New Testament said about speaking in tongues. I first read the account in the second chapter of Acts. That event seemed for the purpose of communicating the gospel in the different languages that the people knew. The disciples were granted the power to preach the mighty works of God in understandable terms to the people of many nationalities who were in Jerusalem at that time. It did not seem to me that last night's event related to that at all.

Then I remembered Paul's treatise on spiritual gifts, and I turned over to 1 Corinthians and began to read chapter 12. Here Paul does legitimize tongues as a gift of the Spirit, but he considers it a lesser gift, purely for the purpose of personal edification, and advises against using it in public worship. He also suggests it has little value without interpretation. I read carefully and thoughtfully through his beautiful hymn on love, which he expounds as the highest gift of all, and to the end of chapter 14. Closing the Bible, I sat quietly for a while and then prayed, "God, I can't honestly say I want to speak in tongues, but if I need this experience for my own edification, please remove my resistance and give it to me now."

At that very moment, above the noise of the waterfalls, I heard the sound of voices, and, looking upstream, I saw two little boys and a dog coming towards me. With some annoyance at their intrusion, I watched them advance; but although they walked within a few feet of where I was sitting, they never saw me and passed on down the stream out of sight. Not even the dog was aware of my presence. As I watched

them disappear, the solution to my problem was suddenly clear to me. I was being instructed to let God's children in that camp go in whatever way they chose without interference or judgment, just as I had allowed those children to pass by. I did not have to say anything to the people in the camp about their excessive inclination to speak in tongues nor make any comments on it whatsoever. My only concern need be for myself. I was to ask the Spirit for the higher gifts of wisdom and love and to share these as a balancing force in that emotionally-charged environment of the camp.

"Am I not to speak in tongues?" I asked, and forthwith came the answer, "You don't need it. It is a step certain people must take in order to advance spiritually. Remember, there are many ways by which the Holy Spirit is manifested. Go back to the camp without your judgments and continue to speak the truth as you know it." I have lived close enough to the "inner voice" experience to know that the guidance that comes within me is always reliable if I have prepared myself inwardly to receive it. For me, there are never spoken words at such times but rather the powerful unfolding of a conscious thought which every instinct within me declares to be trustworthy.

Obeying the direction I was given, I stayed at the camp, and it turned out to be one of the most valuable experiences I have ever had in such a setting. That is not to say it did not continue to be a challenge. I saw a continued misuse of tongues by a few, accompanied by the concept that those who spoke in tongues had the Holy Spirit and

those who did not speak in tongues did not have the Holy Spirit. I knew this was not true. There was pretense on the part of two or three to claim the gift when they didn't really have it, and some made tongues-speaking a fetish which they cultivated for its sake alone. I could understand all of it in a new light, however, and did not allow it to deter me from what I felt God wanted me to learn and to do. I was given a glimpse into the lives of some people who used the gift of tongues in what I would call a legitimate way, that is, as God seemingly intended it. Those people generally did it only in private prayer, never called attention to it nor insisted anyone else should do it. They told me that for them it silenced the conscious mind and made communion with God more direct, almost to the exclusion of any language. They also seemed to feel it better equipped them to do the work God had given them to do, and that it endued them with more of the fruits of the spirit. These people freely admitted one could experience the Holy Spirit and receive its fruits without the gift of tongues. They also confided that the practice of tongues-speaking had meant more to them in its initial stages, but as time went on, they found it less useful and important. They did not regret its passing into a less prominent place but rather felt that was as it should be in the process of spiritual development.

As a result of that camp experience I was able to accept the the possibility that for some people the gift of tongues can awaken in them a sense of communication with God. I was also able to realize

that even though it was not to be a part of my religious experience, and hence beyond my complete understanding, it had valid meaning for others. I am convinced we are only given those experiences congruent with our own temperment and personality; subsequently there is no one way by which we must come to know God. Our religious experiences are not imposed on us from without but by something already within us. That which is quickened or released by the Holy Spirit within us will always be most compatible with our own inner nature.

William James reminds us there are inherent dangers in any emotional experience that is not turned into constructive action. I have seen many people get over-charged and short-circuit because they couldn't direct the power of a heavy emotion, like tongues-speaking, into useful channels. Pentecost had one purpose -- to establish the worldwide church. The purpose of our Christian walk is not to acquire any experience for the sake of the experience alone; rather it is to live as Christ lived and to let Him be glorified in us and through us.

One man summed it up well for me when he said, "When I first spoke in tongues, I was like a child who thought I had everything. The day I became a man was when I knew I had nothing, that I was dependent upon God for all of it. When I realized that, God was then able to use me as the channel for His love to this world, and that has meant much more to me than speaking in tongues could ever mean."

CHAPTER XXV

SHARING JESUS WITH SUE ELLEN

Sue Ellen was a young mother with two small children who had come to one of the summer camps where I was speaking. She was beautiful without knowing it, for had she known it, some of her rich, natural splendor would have been lost. She was casual in dress and style after the manner of many young women of her generation; yet even barefooted and in jeans, with her long brown hair hanging straight down her back, she had a purity and an elegance that was striking. Sue Ellen was a deeply religious person with a Pentecostal background who made the very common mistake, shared by many in the fervor of a strong religious devotion and emotion, of thinking she had found the only truth. She had found truth for herself; I must concede that. But her error was in thinking that she had also found the truth for everyone else, or in thinking of truth as a stagnant proposition or set of laws that never changes.

Let me say parenthetically that I do believe that there is an Absolute Truth, that which is, has been, and ever will be. This eternal Truth ever accords with God as divine principle and resides in fullness at the very core of every person's being. However, no person ever expresses that Truth fully. Christians believe that Jesus did, and I believe by consciously unifying ourselves with the indwelling Christ,

we begin to apprehend the Absolute Truth. Our problem is that we often define a particular stage of apprehension as Truth rather than the process by which Truth is being revealed. There is always something new to be learned if we will just keep our minds open. That is the point where fundamentalists often have their quarrel with me -- they think my mind is so open that everything has fallen out.

Sue Ellen was distressed with me from the first day she heard me speak. She did not hear the phrases and formulae by which her truth was expressed. Instead she heard new phrases and new words that challenged her fortress of faith. She heard interpretations of scriptures that varied with her own. Having been trained to be ever alert against the antichrist that assumes many guises to pervert the truth and lead others astray, she reluctantly identified me as an enemy of the true faith. I say reluctantly because Sue Ellen was not a vicious person. In fact, our spiritual separation caused her much pain because, in ways she could not then understand nor analyze, our spirits had touched at some depth common to all who define life by infinite dimensions, and we had established a spark of divine communication. It was that which made it harder for her to be alienated from me.

Deeply troubled, she came to me one day and asked me to pray for Jesus to come into my heart and reveal His <u>true</u> message for the people so that I would speak His words and not mine. She told me that a small group of others in the camp were meeting daily to pray for my soul. I was touched by her concern, and told her so, but I also knew that what

they were praying to happen to me was not going to happen, for I had long ago outgrown their idea of a religious experience, and what I had not outgrown, I had circumvented. My encouragements for her greater tolerance of the spiritual ground that another finds hallowed only increased her sadness for me, as she said, "I cannot hallow that which is not of Him." I knew that she believed I was not saved because of my ideas of universalism, and it weighed heavily on her heart.

She came the next morning to the session, carrying her large, worn Bible, and sat with lowered eyes and obviously dejected spirit. The sight of that well-thumbed Bible in her hands released in me an even deeper sense of appreciation for her. I felt truly sorry to be the cause of her inner disturbance, but at the same time I knew that places of disturbance are where we do our best growing.

I began my talk around an experience Beverly and I had had when we shared our home for a year with a lonely, homeless boy who had wandered into our lives. I was trying to establish the fact that extending real help to another person is not to extend doctrines, ideas, or our versions of truth, but rather to extend love in its purest Christlike form. That experience with Mike, which I shall relate in the next chapter, had proved to me that the word has to become flesh and dwell in us before we can extend the word to another, and that the extension of that word will always be in the form of the most Christlike compassion and understanding instead of our human judgments and recriminations.

Suddenly in the midst of my talk Sue Ellen threw her hands over her head and let out a scream that nearly lifted the roof from the building. Her fingers were like claws in the air, and her face was contorted into hideous lines. She began to screech in a high-pitched raucous voice, unlike her own, "I am the Lord thy God. Hearken unto me. Your evil is an abomination in my sight. Return unto me, and I will save you. Confess your iniquity and I will blot out your transgressions." She went on for a few minutes straining out similar phrases that sounded like quotes from one of the Old Testament prophets; then her voice dwindled into hoarse, racking sobs that shook her entire body.

Needless to say I had stopped speaking. Everybody sat there absolutely electrified and totally motionless. Then the girl sitting next to Sue Ellen reached over and put her arms around her, and Sue Ellen fell against her, crying like a child. Someone in the back of the room began singing "Praise God from whom all blessings flow," and others in the room took it up. Just as I determined to go to Sue Ellen, she got up and ran out. When the song ended, I asked the people to join me in a prayer, in which I gave thanks for Sue Ellen and her deep faith and prayed for all of us to understand this moment from the higher realization of the Truth of Christ. Then I completed my talk.

I did not see Sue Ellen again until the next day at the morning hour in the meadow at the activity called rhythms, where body relaxation and movement are taught as parallels to spiritual relaxation and growth. The rhythms leader asked us to turn to the nearest person and give a

spiritual gift. I turned and found myself looking into the clear, blue eyes of Sue Ellen. She took my hand, and then I put my arms around her. I held her for a few moments as she wept quietly. Then she moved back from me, still holding my hand, and said, "Rod, I want to share with you the deepest and most perfect gift of my life. I want to share my Jesus with you."

I said to her as gently as I could, "Sue Ellen, each of us sees Jesus in a slightly different way. I am sure I need your sight to see Him more clearly, and I welcome it. But I also think you need mine. So I want to share that same gift with you. Sue Ellen, I want to share my Jesus with you."

She looked deep into my eyes, and I saw something in her depths stir and begin to break. "You do love Him, don't you," she said, almost wonderingly.

"With all my heart."

Tears spilled out on her cheeks, and she dropped my hand and ran across the meadow and out of sight. It was the last time I saw her, for shortly afterwards camp was over and we all went home. What happened in that last moment of our encounter? It is my hope Sue Ellen was able to validate my faith and religious experience as authentic, even though different from her own. It is my hope that she may have understood in a flashing moment of revelation, by seeing deeply into the soul of another, that Truth is always much larger than the dimensions of our own understanding, and that it is always a person that has the richest value and

not the person's ideas. And it is my hope that the richness and sensitivity of a soul known on this earth as Sue Ellen will go on growing and expressing itself as an ever more perfect manifestation of the highest Truth we all seek, for of such as Sue Ellen is the kingdom of God.

CHAPTER XXVI

MIKE -- AN INVESTMENT IN LOVE

The door to the church office opened one day, and in walked a tall, slender boy with yellow, shoulder-length hair. I had just returned from conducting a funeral and was going to spend my only free hour of that day tending to some correspondence, but as he looked at me from the depths of some reflected misery and asked, "Could I talk to you?", I knew that the correspondence must wait.

When he sat down in my office, I said, "Tell me what's wrong." Immediately he burst into tears. I sat awkwardly while he cried. Finally I obeyed the impulse to go over and put my arms around his heaving shoulders. His story came out in disconnected, non-sequential bits, a story whose title could only be Rejection when seen in its entirety. Abandoned by his mother when he was eleven, this lad had spent seven desperate years in search of some stability and meaning. When he became old enough to be drafted, he fled from his draft board and a war that was repugnant to him and had come to the Bay Area, the place which looms as the promised Utopia for many lonely, driven people. Except it isn't; there is no Utopia to be found anywhere in the outer world. Sleeping on the roof of the YMCA until it became too cold, he had finally moved into a commune but had been evicted because of his inability to contribute any financial support. The final blow was that he had not heard from his

girl in Michigan for weeks. She was the only person in the world for whom he cared or felt cared for him, and he feared that her parents, who disapproved of the relationship of their daughter to him, were intercepting their letters. So Mike came into the big white church on the corner of his aimless wanderings because somewhere in him there survived a belief that the church was a place of help.

I strongly suspected a drug problem and some resulting disorder of manic-depression, and he admitted to heavy uses of marijuana and frequent experimentations with LSD. But even without a drug problem, Mike had more than the average person has to cope with. When we parted, I asked him to come back with his belongings and promised I would find him a place to stay and help him look for a job.

When I came back to the office that night after a late meeting, Mike was waiting on the steps. We got in the car. I planned to take him to a hotel and get him a room, but a strong inner voice kept urging me not to abandon this boy; so I said to him, "Mike, would you like to stay at our home tonight?"

"I don't want to be any trouble," he answered.

"You won't be. We can talk in the morning about some possibilities of where you can go from here."

When I brought him into the house, I said to Beverly, "This is Mike. He needs a place tonight." She welcomed him and showed him to the guest room, where he stacked his pitifully few belongings in a corner. Then he sat down on the rug in front of the bed and stared at the floor.

We left him alone for a few moments, and, when I looked in, one of our little dogs, Count-Me-Too, had gone in to get acquainted with this sad-looking man-child. Count was standing on his hind legs with his paws against Mike's shoulders, looking at him with that curious outpouring of sympathy that animals seem to have for any kind of melancholia. Suddenly I saw Mike grab the little dog and bury his face in his white coat, holding him tight against him for a long moment. It was a sign to me of Mike's need and our ability to meet some of that need.

After discussing it with Beverly, the next morning at breakfast I offered to let Mike live with us until he found some means of support. I advanced only one restriction: that he not use any drugs at our place or bring them home with him. I could tell Mike wanted to come, but he was loathe to impose himself anywhere. When I convinced him that we wanted him and believed that this is what God would have us do, he told me that suicide was foremost in his thoughts last night. I knew then why I had been directed not to abandon him in some cheap hotel.

Mike's "little while" with us lasted a year altogether, and that year brought some dramatic changes into his life. I helped him find a parttime job as a janitor, and he enrolled in college. He slowly changed from a gloom-struck, withdrawn boy into an open, responsive person. He had a keen mind and many interesting ideas to share, and we had many long talks about life, religion, the Vietnam war, a capitalistic society, drugs, music, and all the things that comprise the interest of any eighteen year old. He was trustworthy and helpful, and I never had a

moment of regret that I had asked him to live with us.

There finally came a day when Mike declared his intention to go back to Michigan and to face his draft board as a conscientious objector. "I could live here forever and be happy," he said, "only I know I can't. I have to make it without props."

On the last night he was with us, he gave us his favorite record album by a rock group called "Spooky Tooth," and then, in the middle of watching a television program, he turned to us with tears in his eyes and said, "I want you both to know I love you." I was deeply touched.

The next day I drove Mike to a spot in Berkeley near the freeway where hitchhikers line up, (he insisted on that mode of travel) and as I drove away, my last image was of long, blonde hair blowing freely, a warm smile as he waved goodbye to me, and an expression of trusting expectancy as he held out his thumb. In his hand was a sign, "US 80 TO MICHIGAN," which I had carefully lettered for him, and which Mike had deplored as being a little too neat for his hippie image.

As I drove past the lonely figures of many young people standing there waiting for rides to take them somewhere, (one sign read, "ANYWHERE BUT HERE") I had a new feeling for them. I did not understand all of the disorientation and rebellion that marked the youth scene, and perhaps I never would, but I had made an investment in it through Mike. I had helped at least one person move in the direction of a more fulfilled, responsible life, and from that person I had received a great love and a reconfirmed sense of what it means to help someone by letting him be what

he chooses to be.

Mike's story is still unfolding; hence, I shall not attempt to put an ending to it. People do not live happily ever after, in spite of what fairy tales promise, and we need not imagine ourselves as essential in bringing any life chapter but our own to a successful close. Mike will write the rest of his lifestory without any props from me. We still hear from him occasionally, and there is much growth yet needed and much growth yet to come. That is not only true for Mike, however; it is true for me as well. In that brief encounter with him, we made an investment of love that opened the way for that growth to continue, leaving Mike, Beverly, and me infinitely and forever changed into better persons.

CHAPTER XXVII

MOMENTS OF REALITY

A great deal of scientific research is being conducted today on the human states of consciousness. Researchers found as far back as the 1920's that certain internal psychological states of the mind are consistently associated with a corresponding activity of the brain. A further advance has been made by the discovery of biofeedback, a technique for monitoring these brain waves externally to find out what is happening internally. I do not propose to write here with any scientific assessment but will leave that to the experts in the field. I simply want to point out that scientists are beginning to explain what happens when we pray and meditate and enter into the alpha rhythm, a state where we seem to have enhanced awareness and an equal love for everyone and everything. The science is still in its infancy, and no one knows for sure what the future holds; but it could be that, as it joins hands with religion in the search to understand "altered states of consciousness," it will bring about greater horizons of good and human fulfillment that anything we have heretofore experienced.

Yet while the science of assessing the religious experience is new, the experience itself is as ancient as humanity. As I have grown in the religious life, I have come to realize on a few occasions those transcended levels above the plane of daily human existence where for

a few brief moments we may touch the hem of life's reality. These are levels that every devout seeker may find to some degree as through prayer and meditation the shadows of mortality clear away to help us see beyond into the dimensions of the cosmos. I share with you in this chapter, as non-analytically as possible, some of those experiences, when for a brief time I became a part of the unitive Whole of Life. I do this out of no sense of personal achievement but rather in humble gratitude for the little enlightenment it has been my good fortune to taste.

I have described that night in church when I was fifteen and went forward in response to the evangelist's invitation. Never before in my life had I known such peace and joy as I felt those few moments in the aisle of the church. Conscious thought was totally displaced by the merging of my being into the level I came later to define as the superconscious. At first I searched for a duplication of that experience, but it never returned in exactly the same way, and I have come to feel that we must accept each breakthrough of this kind for its own unique quality and not expect to repeat it.

I would not classify my miracle at the Matterhorn quite in this category. That was a penetration of the divine into the human in terms of a guidance I needed then, and, though the spiritual element was certainly a dominant factor, the result was more a mental awakening than a spiritual one. It was like reading a familiar passage of scripture and suddenly having a new light of discernment dawn so that you exclaim, "Oh, so

that's what that means!" The awakening of our mental perceptions to spiritual wisdom is always a satisfying incident, but it is not the experience I am talking about here.

I am sure Jesus knew revelations of higher spiritual reality in His own prayer experiences; otherwise He would not have been able to affirm with such conviction His own oneness with God and all humanity. Since Jesus never wished to withhold anything from us that He knew, He prayed for our oneness with God and with each other in the same manner that He knew it, so that we also might come to a realization of Life in its infinite dimensions.

Let me digress briefly to say that I am not a person given to experiencing the psychic phenomenon. I never see lights or hear voices from the psychic realm, as some do. I don't doubt that it is possible for some to step into that dimension where they may read thoughts, see auras, communicate with non-physical entities, diagnose illnesses, and even penetrate the barriers of mortal space and time. Variations of these are available to all of us. But I feel that it is possible to short-circuit at this level and get immersed in the phenomenon for the phenomenon's sake, and thus to worship the experience rather than the Source beyond the experience. My best inner guidance has always directed me to walk through the psychic realm as rapidly as possible and get on to a higher scale.

There may be some gifts from the psychical plane that we can use to human advantage, but I do not believe that the highest truth is there. I have known a few rare souls who seemed able to remain Christ-centered

while still experiencing the dimensions of the psychic, but I have also known others to become totally unbalanced by its challenges. Anything with such potential danger is best avoided. If we will "seek first the kingdom of God" with our whole being, those things right for us will be added as we are ready for them. God will not send anything to tempt or unbalance us if we remain sincere in seeking from the source of His goodness and love. It sounds platitudinous and preachy, but nevertheless I feel it is true that if we keep ourselves centered on God through Jesus Christ we will never experience anything on the spiritual dimension that is not ultimately energizing, edifying, and illuminating.

The first of my experiences in the higher dimension came in the fall of 1964 at Asilomar near Monterey, California where I was attending my first CFO Camp. It began as a dreadful experience for me. The theology of the speakers seemed naive, the singing and rhythmic exercises struck me as silly and infantile, and the constant hugging and other manifest expressions of affection seemed inauthentic. In such a mood of resistance I walked down to the beach one late afternoon.

I climbed to some rocks and sat watching the waves pound against the jagged shore line. I noted sea gulls swooping out over the breakers. Gradually my eyes moved to the horizon where the rose and gray tints of the sky seemed to merge into a perfect blend with the sea so that it was impossible to tell where one ended and the other began. Then a channel opened up in the clouds, and a bar of golden sunlight streamed down into the water. Simultaneous with the appearance of that gilded bolt from the

heavens, I clearly heard the words, "Rodney, I love you."

Startled, I looked around to see who might have spoken them, but I was quite alone. I sat totally quiet, listening with every cell and atom of my being, but nothing else happened. Gradually the stream of sunlight began to fade as the clouds closed, and I began to wonder if I had only imagined the words. The more I reflected, the more I wondered if I had heard any words at all; yet spoken or not, my conscious apprehension of those words was real.

As I made my way back across the dunes to the evening meeting, I felt happier and lighter. The shadow of unhappiness and criticism had lifted. That night the speaker, Brother Mandus from England, talked about God's Healing Love. I can't repeat much of what he said, except I remember he asked this question, "Have you ever had the experience of God telling you personally how much He loved you?" Into my heart a new feeling found lodgment at that moment, a feeling that God was proud of me, proud of what I was and what I was doing, as a parent is proud of its child, and that He had told me so that afternoon on the beach. The guilt and sense of judgment that often accompanied my thoughts of God left me forever in that hour. Before I went to sleep that night, I wrote down what had happened to me on the beach in the fading light of that October day, and ended it with this question, "Have I turned another corner in the direction of Truth?" It was remarkable how the rest of that camp experience took on a new and appealing nature after that.

Ten years later I went back to Asilomar to the CFO Healing Camp,

only this time I went as one of the speakers. I was amazed to realize how much growth had come to me in those ten years as I had lived with the awareness of a Love of both personal and infinite dimensions upholding my life. I had indeed turned a corner.

The second of these experiences came about seven years after the first one when I visited a meditation retreat center in Southern California with a group of friends with whom there had been several days of deep sharing and communication. As we sat in that room at the top of the mountain, a room which had been set aside for prayer and meditation and which was visited by people from all over the world, I found myself enfolded in the most transcending silence I had ever known. This silence fell on me like a holy cloak and wrapped me into such a shelter of love that tears flowed silently from the recesses of some untouched depth. Weeping is not something I do a lot, but when tears come, I have discovered they often carry healing, sometimes for myself, sometimes for others. I wept that day because of the sense of the tremendous Love that seemed to be everywhere. Never a word was uttered by any of us during the half hour we were in that room, but each second was a profound experience of Love in the highest dimension.

I concluded later that others in that room with me were important agents in releasing the higher vibrations of consciousness, and that the atmosphere of the room itself may have been previously purified by the holier thoughts of those who visited it. I am sure that more than just mortals were there. I do believe that He stood in our midst,

just as He promised He would when two or three gather in His name. His manifestation in the gathered group will always have a dimension that we cannot find in solitude.

When we left that mountain and drove back through the town, I had a visible apprehension of life that was new. It was a bright, sunny day; yet some people on the streets seemed to be standing under shadows, while others looked radiant with a glow of inner light. I seemed to have been granted the privilege for a few minutes of seeing the inner expression of people rather than the outer and could understand then how we all dwell in varying shades of light or darkness according to our own spiritual awareness. That apprehension has not returned to me since that day, and I do not think it need return. It was given to me once and for once only to make me perceptive to the fact that the reality of a person is not in the physical or outer appearance. Since the physical is all we normally see, we must be very cautious with our judgments because we lack full information. Jesus said that we may judge by righteous judgments only, and I understand now what He meant: not until we have looked on the inner reality of a person do we dare make any assessments. Yet the marvel was that for those people standing that day in shadows I felt not the slightest judgment but rather an outgoing compassion.

I call that experience my personal Mount of Transfiguration when, with Jesus and a few of His twentieth century disciples, I entered briefly into the higher realms of the Christ Consciousness and summarily explored a universe wider than my own views of it had been.

The final experience in this land of expanded consciousness that I want to share came in the summer of 1975 when Beverly and I, with a company of twenty-eight friends from our church, went down the Colorado River of the Grand Canyon from Lee's Ferry, Arizona, to Lake Mead, Nevada, a distance of nearly three hundred miles, by motor-powered rafts. It took us eight days, and this particular experience happened to me on the third night. I share it with some trepidation for it is yet so new that I am not sure I fully understand it, nor do I know why it occurred when it did. It came about in this way.

The sun was low on canyon walls when we pulled our boats from the heavy current of the river onto a sandy spit that extended itself to meet us. It had been a heady day of following that river, moving serenly for long stretches at a time, and then periodically erupting with it in a foment of churning rapids that required all the skill of the boatmen to keep us from turning over. It had been an exciting day and a good day, but now the prospect of some dry clothes, a hot meal, and a night's sleep seemed even more appealing.

We cooked our meal over the open fire, ate it sitting on rocks that were partly submerged by clean, white sand, and for the thousandth time we let our gaze wander to the top of the sculptured walls of the canyon that soared thousands of feet above us. Words were few, and when they came, were spoken in quiet, reverential tones as though we were in some great cathedral.

Darkness came quickly, and we made our way to the places we had

selected to sleep. Beverly and I chose a little promontory close to the river, scooped out some hollows in the sand to fit the contours of our bodies, spread our sleeping bags, and stretched out. For a few moments I tried vainly to imagine what life was like back home in the midst of a city, but it was too far away and too unreal. I contemplated anxiously the fact that there were engineers and technicians who wanted to destroy this place of natural wonder by damming the river for a power source, and I vowed not to sit idly by and let that happen. We prayed together briefly, and in a short time I fell asleep.

I must have slept for a few hours when suddenly I awoke. The full moon, just touching the edge of the canyon walls, was transforming my cavern of darkness into a place of ethereal mystery and intoxicating loveliness. All the usual things around me were starting to change in that miraculous new light. The mounded shapes of my companions in their sleeping bags a few feet away emerged from the gentle blur of darkness into distinct forms as the moon began to touch them.

Suddenly I saw in those early moments of waking, beyond any words of mine to describe, how wildly beautiful and joyously wonderful is all of life. I felt myself drawn up into the luminosity of the firmament until it was as though I was the link that united the heavens to the earth. Hanging breathless and suspended in space and time, I felt an irresistable and tremendous sense of Love take possession of me, the same flooding joyousness that I had experienced that day at the ocean and again on the mountaintop, except this time it seemed even more intense.

For those glorified moments I was in love with every living thing. No, it was more than that -- I was every living thing. I was the water rushing in its headlong course towards the sea. I was the tamarisk and willow trees bending in the gentle night breeze. I was the invisible creature scurrying in the grass at the edge of my sand hollow. I was the little bat patterning the space over my head. I was my friends sleeping nearby. I was the luminous moon and each apex of the sparkling triangle of stars. I was all of it, and I was madly in love with all of it.

Then, as if the miracle of that moment was not enough, I heard a faint metallic humming like the sigh of electric wires which broke into gentle crescendos of sound. It seemed as though every chord and note of music I could imagine was being sounded at once, yet in perfect harmony and attunement. Of myself I was no longer conscious. My very soul flowed out of me into the abundance and reality of Life and into the deep, ecstatic joy of all living things.

I cannot say how long it lasted, perhaps not more than ten minutes, but even as it faded, I was left with a wholly exquisite feeling. There was none of the usual burden of responsibility I often felt, and life spread out before me as a glorious, shining happiness.

I suppose it could be labeled a mystical experience, but no title and no description can do it justice. I only know that for a brief space of transcended time, while lying on the bank of the Colorado River in the heart of the Grand Canyon on a warm August night, I touched the

hand of God as He joined me and all other grains of sand to the stars and moon, and that for one full intoxicating instant I stood on the edge of eternity where, accompanied by the music of the spheres, I glimpsed the face of the universe.

Scientists tell us that our universe is filled with music created by the motion of the atoms and rhythmic vibrations of the electrons, a symphony which we cannot hear because our human ears are limited to receiving only seven and a half octaves. Likewise we know there are many ranges of color all around us which our mortal eyes cannot distinguish because of our limited vision. In the higher dimensions of feeling and awareness we somehow transcend these and other mortal limitations. All these kinds of experiences derive their value from our inner attitudes and sincerity of purpose. In essence, they are common for all who share in a devotion to the spiritual destiny of life, although they are always expressed in slightly different ways because we all have different points of reference. Yet the final realization is the same for all -- a deep sense of peace and well-being and a loving relatedness to everything that is. There are always those who react to these kinds of experiences as illusionary, and that is precisely why the mystical defies so many -- it cannot be engendered, understood, or extrapolated purely by the physical laws of this universe as we have understood them. That explains some of the growing scientific interest with "altered states of consciousness." The scientists are now aware of the unknown and uncharted worlds of the human mind produced by prayer

and meditation and are starting to explore and even experience these worlds personally.

Perhaps the extension of this friendly hand from science will help us realize that mysticism is also a science with a farreaching and mysterious magnitude. Perhaps it will bring us into such an advanced state of awareness that we will see through all cosmic illusions into the plains of our human habitation without the ordinary weight of our personal desires or motivations. And perhaps as religionists and scientists walk this pathway together, it will bring us into such a love affair with each other that we may yet learn how to dissolve the anguish and suffering of this life through such a pathway. Could it be that our physical reality is only a shadow of the reality of our true existence -- a reality that is hidden somewhere and somehow in God? If so, then our search for the reality of God and the reality of self is really one and the same. Meanwhile, I have seen and experienced just enough to keep me forever a hound on the trail of heaven as the goal of this earth.

CHAPTER XXVIII

BAGGAGE LIMITS FOR A MIDDLE-AGED EARTH PASSENGER

When I was nineteen, in the flush of a patriotic fervor engendered by our war in Korea, I went to Boise, Idaho with some friends to enlist in the air force. I was rejected because of a supposed heart murmur, a condition which later turned out to be non-existent. Coming down the elevator in the recruitment center, following that somewhat disappointing experience, I read this sign on the elevator wall:

KEEP SMILING, GOD IS WHERE HE WAS!

That bit of religious graffito lifted my spirits immeasurably. I have carried the words of that sign all these years, as I have come to know that there is no place, time, or circumstance where God is not. This belief in God's all-sustaining and caring Presence and His Master Plan for each life has guided me through many times of loneliness and disappointment, even though the pathway has more often been on stairs that forced me to struggle through the darkness rather than on elevators that carried me quickly to a desired destination. For me there has been no get-rich-quick mysticism, no cheap, easy grace. Salvation has been a life process of seeking wholeness rather than one instantaneous moment of final deliverance. I thank God this has been so!

A few years ago, shortly after I turned forty, an unaccountable depression settled over me that I could not seem to shake. It came in

much the same way that certain forms of blindness come -- a gradual blurring of sight, so slow in its approach that one almost succeeds in adjusting to it without knowing that anything is drastically wrong. This is followed by the suspicion that certain books and magazines are printed with blurred type, and finally that is succeeded by the horrifying realization that sight is going. I have a blind cousin, and she described the process to me. A person losing sight must come to realize it is not the world that is blurring, it is one's own eyes.

When my depression first came, like a person losing sight, I thought the world around me was blurring. Then one day I was struck forcefully with the realization that the joy of living was somehow gone in me, in the world of my own being, and that I was afloat in a sea of despair with no land in sight. I felt my sermons had become sterile and uninspiring, my pastoral work seemed ineffective, and all my public performances took on a perfunctory dullness. These feelings induced a loss of self-confidence. I wondered if I should seek a vocational change; yet the prospect of starting work in another vocation or in a different church was unappealing. At first I clung desperately to the forms that had nourished and given hope to others in the past. I began to read the great devotional classics and autobiographies of mystics and religious seekers, questing for the key that they had found and which I hoped would unlock me from the growing shroud of darkness that seemed to be hovering over me. These writers all sent me to the same place for cure -- within my own soul.

I sought a quiet place in my garden, and, there beneath the apple trees that were just bursting into bloom, with the sound and sight of God's world renewing itself around me, I turned within and prayed for healing. I have never prayed as fervently nor as sincerely as I did then. I did not beg, I did not beseech, I did not inform God. It was neither reverence by rote nor appeasement by anguish. I had tried those methods of prayer enough to know that they were misguided and essentially useless forms. I simply tried to sense His nearness and allow Him to hold me through the dark and lonely time when no human aid was sufficient. Wholeness did not come immediately, but it did come, almost as gradually as the despair had come, so quietly that at first it was almost unnoticed.

One day at my garden altar while I was reading a devotional book, I came across these words, written as though spoken by the Master to me: "I see your trouble and I know your confusion. I am where I have always been. I have not forsaken you, and I will not leave you. I need you, and I will see you through." Those words gave no assessment of my condition, no assignment of blame, just a promise that He was where He had always been, that He would be with me. It was the promise of the elevator sign expanded to its higher power -- <u>God needed me</u>. As I held to that thought and spoke those words to the deeps of my subconscious, there was slowly born back into me a new sense of worth that the depression had threatened to destroy. The darkness began to pass with my dawning awareness that not only did I need God -- God needed me! What

power there is in our thoughts!

From this side of that situation I can now assess some of the causes for the emotional slump. I was encountering several serious and perplexing problems, some of them personal, which I do not choose to discuss here. These came congruent with and perhaps because of my entering that point in life known as middle age, a time most of accept as "going over the hill." Middle age is an ominous time, for middle-aged people must stand as a balance between what was and what will be, a buffer between the youth generation, which America chooses to adore, and the senior years, which are afforded a certain veneration. Often unloved and maligned, the middle-aged person is told that many of life's fondest dreams of success and achievement will not now be forthcoming, that the best is not necessarily to be in growing old, and that he or she is no longer a desirable candidate for the world of economic or professional achievement. It is greatly disillusioning to be told, "You've had it. You're no longer necessary." On top of this, the body of the middle-aged male and female enters into the menopause cycle in its effort to accomodate and adjust to the transitional demands. Is it any wonder that middle-aged people often feel caught, cornered, unfulfilled, and depressed? They are forced to come to grips with their finiteness in a totally new and frightening way.

Contrary to what I had been led to believe, however, I discovered that the middle years can be some of the richest and most useful if we will accept the fact that <u>all</u> of life is for living and creating. Some

of the most productive and creative gifts have been released from lives after they passed forty. The spiritual genius of Glenn Clark did not find full expression until he was forty-two when he began to write. Prior to that he had been in a time of depression and frustration. E. Stanley Jones once came to a distressing point in mid-life where he knew he could go no farther until he went deeper. When he did, his most productive years followed. It may well be that we need the challenge of a tragedy before we will or can go deeper. God never lays us on the shelf as useless at any age. His whispered word to me in my time of despondency that He needed me in this grand enterprise of life is the universal word to all who will go within themselves to hear it.

As I emerged from the cocoon of gloom that had spun itself around me for those few months, I came to a realization of the importance of baggage limits for this earth journey. Life is too short and too precious to carry around a lot of unnecessary luggage in terms of habits, attitudes, and beliefs. Airlines have a limit on the weight of baggage that one may carry on a trip; so does the life journey impose baggage restrictions. It is up to us whether or not we will obey those restrictions, but we ignore them to our peril. There is a law that governs the being of a tree and causes it to release its old leaves at just the right moment to prepare way for the new leaves. This same law governs the being of a human. If we will listen to it, we will pass from a material consciousness to a spiritual consciousness, and we will release our outmoded ideas and destructive thoughts to make way for the new to come at the right

time and in the right way. Thus we will not be weighed down with any extraneous or useless items.

As a result of brushing shoulders against the edge of the dark night of the soul, I have accepted the fact that the most important item I carry with me on this journey is an ever-expanding sense of God-consciousness. Without it I may survive, but I will not survive at a very high level. The spiritual resources that I took with me into that experience meant that I did not have to learn to pray from some pit of despair. I already knew how to pray, and I could automatically apply what I knew until my reasoning and spiritual instincts were back to a more normal level. I believe that life at its highest level on this earth is a spiritual journey of the soul and that prayer is the heartbeat of the soul that keeps us moving forward in a forward and upward direction. It is from the deep levels of prayer that the signposts appear that give us direction and that save us from some foolish detour or dead-end. It may sound naive and simplistic to say that world problems have their solutions through prayer; nevertheless, I am firmly convinced that if enough people understood and used the laws of prayer in the manner in which Jesus taught and used them, the peace for which we all long and struggle would be here as a reality. God-consciousness, which can only be realized through prayer and meditation, requires that I learn to co-exist peacefully with all my companions on this earth journey.

In the ignorance of youth I was once prepared to kill human beings on this planet. I was willing to be a part of the war machine

because I thought that this was how one preserved a free world. Today I know that waging war never accomplishes a lasting peace and that we will always be involved in conflicts with other nations until we learn a better way than war. Besides, the implements of war have become too destructive to use. We now have missiles and weaponry that can annihilate everything on land and sea within a few minutes. The problem is that we are not the only nation who has these weapons, and we can be destroyed as effectively as we can destroy. The ultimate Armageddon might well be our own destruction of this earth and its surrounding planets if we do not learn a constructive and peaceful use of the tremendous power of the atom. Our world has too long been controlled by military minds who care nothing for truth, beauty, goodness, and the fulfillment of human potential. If our world is to be made safe, military control of nuclear energy will have to be eliminated, for unless new goals of life enter in with the establishment of idealistic aims, the human race and all that it has accomplished will be destroyed.

The highest law of our being is the law of love, the kind of love that Jesus Christ demonstrated, which says we must not differentiate between any living thing in terms of our treatment, regardless of race, creed, or species. Everything has the right to live. To destroy that right for another is to endanger our own being. The only way we can guarantee a safe and fulfilling life for ourselves is to treat others on this earth as we would be treated. There are no limits as to how far that treatment must extend. It must include everyone in the human world,

absolutely no barriers are acceptable, and it must extend itself reverentially to the non-human world, for everything is precious. It is an insecurity within the worlds of our own being that usually causes us to try to rule or condemn the world of another. When we attempt to dominate another, or when we make judgments against another, we are usually projecting our own fears and anxieties onto them. That is why I have come to realize that the only legitimate rule in which I can be involved is self-rule, the ruling of my own inner realities, and this is paradoxically accomplished only by allowing God-rule. God frees me from my negative and life-destroying beliefs, from my destructive judgments and notions, from my slaughter and oppression of this world and all that is in it.

Our world was given to us with the stamp of God's good upon it and with the commandment to bring nothing into this world but good. Though we have often failed because we have not understood our assignment and the divine formulae for life, we can yet be grateful that there is still time. We live in the greatest and at the same time the most awful age humanity has ever known. On the one hand, we could destroy our world and life as we know it. On the other hand, we could rise to the heights for which we are destined and see the new age of the Christ-consciousness where the highest human potential will be fully realized and perfectly expressed. The latter is our destiny and birthright, and it is my plea that we will not destroy this world before we have completed the Life Experiment.

My baggage for the remainder of my earth journey is relatively

simple. I believe there is a Divine Plan for my life. My greatest work is to know that Plan and allow it to be. Therefore, I am trying to carry with me only the things essential to that Plan. I am not quite like the tree, whose essence is handed to it as a finished product and who knows automatically when to put forth its new leaves by dropping its old, but the same Hand that created the tree has created me. I am learning to consider the tree, as I go to the boundaries of my own possibilities and beyond in order to find myself and my own true essence.

I have a list of a few accumulated treasures that I hope I may be permitted to take with me for the completion of this earth journey. A few heroes I have met on the printed page, like Glenn Clark, Rufus Jones, Gandhi, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, C. S. Lewis, Hermann Hesse, Teilhard de Chardin, and Loren Eiseley, who have been among the many who have spurred my progress toward the lighted mountains; an occasional nostalgic glance to Zane Grey and Edgar Rice Burroughs and their contemporaries who first opened the doors for me to the delightful world of fantasy. A few masters from the music world, like Bach, Brahms, Mozart, and Wagner, whose geniuses have soothed and inspired my spirit through many a brooding hour; and now and then the familiar twang of country fiddle, banjo, and guitar that played the early rhythms of life for me in those Idaho hills. A piece of green earth where I may renew my wonder at the growth of trees, the song of birds, the scent of new-mown hay and sagebrush after rain, the silver trail of moonlight on water, and the brilliant crown of sunlight

on snow-crested peaks. A few good friends, from both the human and the non-human world, to warm and encourage me by their unswerving caring, and who offer to me the chance to care in return. A meaningful work, where or what it matters not as long as it allows my soul its continued freedom in sharing the best of its truth in ways that will bless and light the world. And this above all, the growing awareness of the Immanent Essence of Infinite Life and Power, whose spoken word of Love in Jesus Christ and a few Christ-filled souls on my path has helped me to say yes to the Light, until the Light shone so powerfully in my darkness that the darkness was overcome. These I take with me on my earth journey, a journey that neither begins nor ends on this earth, a journey of the soul to its true home, a journey that has allowed me for this little point in time to be on this mountain.

A little brown spider built her home one night in my typewriter. When I came to work the next morning she had spun her web across the keys. At first I did not see her, and as I struck the first key that destroyed her filament shelter, she dashed in alarm across the space bar and up my arm. With a gentleness almost new to me I lifted her to the window ledge and watched her scurry up the sill for some new retreat center where she could plan her next strategy. She and I are creatures together in one little corner of this cosmic prison. Each of us must learn how to spin our webs in ways that will not deter the progress of the other and that will make it possible for the Life Story to continue. To that end I move on.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE JOURNEY THAT NEVER ENDS

Marshall McLuhan ridiculed people who race forward into the future with their eyes fixed in the rear-view mirror. I hold that to look backward does not mean that we must go backward or that we can't see where we are going. In fact, we may even have a better chance of living more fully in the present and facing the future with hope because we have thought our way out of our past. Repressing or neglecting one's lifestory, or thinking it is irrelevant or unimportant, alienates us from our inner impulses and consequently makes us neglect God.

Writing this book has been both a pain and a joy. Sometimes I have wept as I walked back across the years to the unripe and timorous boy that lived on his own lonely mountain, and sometimes I have laughed at some half-forgotten happening that helped release him from his shut-upness. I have depreciated my attempts to find him until the waste basket was full of pages that only skimmed the rutted surfaces of events, and then I have lifted a page from the typewriter with reverent gladness because it led from nothingness into existence. I have battled my own impossible standards of perfection until I became exhausted with the effort of going the second mile against myself, only to find myself singing because from the undergrowth of words had emerged some moment of communion, some long-eluded lesson of truth. This pilgrimage into

my past has taught me to love me as I was in those formative years and to love more deeply those who had shared my lifestory with me. Thus I found the capacity to give a stamp of approval to all that had happened to me. In religious terms, I learned to thank God for all of it for in all of it I learned to see God. The human soul in each of us seems to demand this pilgrimage for both its liberation and its nourishment. Having thus redeemed our past, we can move into our future space with a greater sense of wholeness, which usually means we are not afraid to share it with others.

I began to share my lifestory in a tentative fashion through sermons and radio messages that were a part of my daily routine as the pastor of the Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church on the church-sponsored "Hour of Prayer" broadcast. There is always the fear when we start to expose our life pilgrimage to others that they may find it humorous, pitiable, or, worse yet, boring. No one wants to be laughed at, scorned, or written off as dull. Certainly I did not. I only wanted to share how my lifestory brought me to God and is ever continuing to do so.

Harvey Cox recently taught a seminar course for Harvard and Radcliffe freshmen called "Theology and Autobiography" to encourage a sense of interiority within the students, rather than a mere remembrance of facts. He discussed the importance of such a class in this way:

> What I hope they did "learn" is that their own personal lives, as well as those of Wisel and Kazantzakis, are enormously significant, utterly unique, and endlessly intriguing. I want them to honor and attend to that life (as I was never really taught to do in my own schooling).

> I hope they learned that anyone who in any future course or anywhere else, asks them to deny their own inner reality is asking something wholly unacceptable. I hope they learned how to fight off the invasion of the body snatchers, never to have their tears and love snared away by any Big Brother. I hope they learned how to keep so closely in touch with their own stories that no one can force them into some role required by a new world, brave or otherwise.[1]

I discovered the more I kept in touch with my story and the more I shared it, the better I felt about me. The psychoanalytic method assures me this is a good thing to do, to reconstruct my personal history, for the pathway to health lies in repressing nothing as too painful to remember. Freud tells us that once we recover our individual history, we find that it is essentially the story of every person. That is why my audience seemed eager and appreciative to hear my life-sharings, not because my experiences were unusually fascinating or idealistically romantic, but because they were much like their own experiences in their own search for love, security, and meaning in this world. My lifestory became their lifestories at points, because the human lifestory is in many ways the same story for all.

Sam Keene says that our starting point in theology must be individual biography and history and that

> "...if I am to discover the holy, it must be in my biography and not in the history of Israel. If there is a principle which gives unity and meaning to history it must be something I touch, feel, and experience."[2]

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[1]Harvey Cox, The Seduction of the Spirit (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), p. 111.

[2]Sam Keen, To a Dancing God (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 99.

Lifestory takes on new significance when we realize it is not just a source of knowledge about a person but an important source of illumination for all of us. This is what James McClendon, Jr., does in his book, "Biography as Theology," as he looks at the lives of several significant persons and examines the theologies by which they lived. Yet McClendon is anxious that we base Christian theology upon more than just each others' experiences:

> Theology is truly Christian only as it bases itself afresh upon its own origin....For a biographical theology (though it acknowledges that the lives it attends to each incorporate convictions) the center must be the lives themselves, or more accurately must be one life, the life of Christ.[1]

My lifestory would be a disconnected jumble today were it not for having found a center in the one life of Jesus Christ. To be able to make anything come out of all that has happened to me that can be significant to others, and therefore make my life something worth talking about, has only come about because I have been confronted by Jesus the Christ. The importance of Jesus is that He is a Way-Shower to God through His own life experience, an experience which He shared through the telling of stories spun from the fabric of His own encounter with the world. His parables and uses of metaphor were reflections of His own lifestory. But not until "Jesus comes into our hearts" (to borrow an old evangelistic phrase) does the life of Jesus make much difference to us. We make Him our Saviour by internalizing His ethics and testing out His teachings in our own life experience. The Protestant notion of testimony and the

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[1]James Wm. McClendon, Jr., Biography as Theology (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), p. 198.

Catholic practice of confessional are elementary forms of lifestory for those who are on those particular pathways; but there must come a time when we graduate from mere verbiage into a new style of living, where we need not talk so much about Jesus but rather live as He lived. It is not until then that lifestory sounds its highest note of religious truth.

God is only knowable through our individual human experience. Not that God is ever fully knowable; yet the best we will ever know about God will not be from some theological textbook, or even from the Bible, but from the warp and woof of life's daily routine, from the human characters that share this routine with us, and from the realization of the ever-present nearness of His Holy Spirit. After all, textbooks and scriptures are but reflections others have made about God in relation to their own life happening. They are valuable sources to us. They provide us with interesting and helpful content. They feed us with a rich knowledge of where others have come from. They hold up for us a mirror to reflect the possibilities of what we might become. But it is not on the printed page of someone else's writings that God is proved for us. It is in our own day to day existence that we find any identifiable substance that we may call God. Hence, our philosophical reflections about God, which is what we mean by theology, are based as much on our individual life-events as on the Christian fact.

Just as everyone's life has common and variable components with the lives of others, so everyone's pathway to God will be different and

yet similar. One can only walk on the pathway that seems compatible with his or her inner being, and for us to insist that another should be on our path is futile and wasted effort. We each have a different frame of reference; we each perceive life from a different angle. There are hundreds of demonstrations today involving the study of perception that have established the fact that the observer is an inseparable part of everything he or she observes. That is, what I see as truth or reality can never be separated from me as the perceiver who views things in a context unique and original to me and me alone.

Few sights are more inspiring than a full moon on the horizon. Yet, as the moon rises higher in the night sky, a curious thing begins to happen. It changes color from a rich orange to a pale white and, what is even more amazing, appears to shrink in size. This apparent change in size and color of the moon with elevation has fascinated and puzzled astronomers and laymen for thousands of years. Atmospheric conditions do account for the observed change in color, but the apparent change in size can be shown to be an illusion. This can be done by comparing photgraphs taken of the full moon on the horizon and then overhead. The sizes of the two images are always identical. Scientists have advanced a number of interesting theories concerning this phenomenon, one being that the illusion is due to the change in the angle from which the moon is perceived, or of the observer's eyeballs in their sockets. When we look at a moon on the horizon, our eyes face straight ahead, but, when we look at a moon overhead, we rotate our

eyes to a different position. Other scientists have hypothesized that the moon appears larger on the horizon because the sky at the horizon appears farther away than the sky overhead, and the observer makes an appropriate compensation for the apparent size of the moon. The most recent studies of the illusion indicate that the apparent size of the moon depends on the visual field surrounding the moon. Near the horizon this field of view is rather small because the distance from the moon to the horizon is small. When the moon is overhead it is in a large empty field. In spite of these investigations, there still remain many unanswered questions about the moon illusion, for it does not explain the fact that there are some people who never perceive a change in size at any time.

Earl Kelley in his book, "Education For What Is Real," describes a demonstration where a person is presented three separate peepholes, about the size of the pupil of the eye, and asked to look through each of these holes in turn. In each case the observer sees a cube with its three dimensions and its square sides. The three cubes look substantially the same and all appear to be the same distance away. Then the observer is permitted to look behind the boards through which the peepholes were cut, and he sees that only one of the holes really has a wire cube behind it. The second is a drawing on a plane with scarcely any of the lines running parallel, and the third is a number of strings stretched between wires running away of the eye. Thus, it is only the first figure that is a cube; the others are not, lacking rectilinear

sides and, in the case of one of them, lacking three dimensions. Figures 2 and 3 only looked like cubes because of the angles from which they were perceived. Also each figure was a different distance from the screen; yet all appeared to be the same distance away.

This demonstration illustrates an important fact about how we perceive. The meaning we assign something may not actually be what is out there at all. Even after observers looked behind the board and saw that two of the figures were wires and a drawing, they still insisted on seeing cubes when they again looked through the peepholes. Kelley summarizes it this way:

> So we go through life receiving stimulus patterns, and rightly or wrongly calling them objects and placing them in relation to ourselves. The name and position we give to the objects do not lie in the objects themselves, but in what we ascribe to them out of our past experience. No two people can do the same ascribing because no two people can bring the same experiential background to the task. So what we call reality lies in each unique background, and not in the objects which send the light rays. The only reality we can experience is what we make of the objects around us, and this is always unique for each of us.[1]

Flip Wilson, the black comedian, has coined a much simpler description of this process: "What you see is what you get." What we see in life is what experiences have taught us to look for. The reality of our own experience makes no sense if separated from its experiential frame of reference.

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[1]Earl Kelley, Education For What Is Real (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1947), p. 29.

I remember one time long ago scouting for wild horses on the desert between Arco and Blackfoot. Those sage flats extend for more than a hundred miles in all directions with nothing to break the arid monotony of the terrain but three buttes rising up in stark outline. Suddenly in front of me I saw a beautiful lake surrounded by green trees; yet there was no lake within miles. It seemed slightly inverted in the air; still it was a lake as surely as anything could be a lake. I was amazed and excited. Then my grandfather explained it was a mirage, an optical illusion caused by the lower level of air being at a different temperature from the higher level, so that a false image was reflected. "Somewhere there may be such a lake," he said, "but we are only seeing its reflection." Even as he explained it to me, the lake continued to be real. Only as we rode in its direction and as it kept retreating from us and finally disappeared, could I finally realize that what I had seen was not what was really there.

My point in these rather lengthy descriptions -- the moon illusion, the peephole experiment, the desert mirage -- is to draw a corollary between these and the methods by which we view life, and hence the route by which we achieve our perceptions of God. While God is not a mirage, all our perceptions of God are to varying degrees illusionary. By this I mean that we all have ideas which misrepresent the true character and nature of God. Since a false impression is all we have at the moment, the false impression remains our reality until such time as new insights will help us form new impressions.

The peephole which life has provided for each of us with which to view God is not the same. My peephole is mine and mine alone, and what I see through my peephole is my only reality; so it is in that reality I must operate. The reality I call God will then be different from the reality someone else calls God, because we are all perceiving from a different angle.

If this is true, what then is the point in our trying to talk about God at all since we are each talking about something different? What is the point of Christian evangelism or missionary efforts? There is, I believe, and will always be a strong imperative to share the gospel of Jesus Christ and the good news of what has happened to us. Life is a dismal, dreary prospect for many people, and they need to know there is a way to break the chains. When we share the story of Jesus, we are sharing the clearest picture we have of God and the basis by which all life can become free. But even our experience with Jesus and our interpretation of His life will not match up with the experiences and interpretations given by His other followers, for these are always being filtered through the funnels of our own individual lifestories.

I plead most strongly, therefore, for a loving tolerance that will refrain from insisting that what happens to us ought to happen to others. We are all different in temperment. Some of us have found that the mystical, or contemplative, path is the right one for us. Others are activists and must be busy doing things. Still others are

intellectuals who follow the path of mental pursuits. This variety in temperment means we will each have a different life experience and the responses we make to God will be different. On the basis of this, I must conclude that the only right pathway to God is the one that is right for me, and no one else. If at intervals we discover others on our pathway, that is great; but we cannot insist that it should happen. Everyone must follow his or her own path.

Believing this frees me of the impossible responsibility of trying to make everyone else just like me and allows me to continue my own unending journey of getting acquainted with myself, of knowing who I am and what I can do. I will also be free to offer real help to my fellow earth travelers, for I will not need to judge them or try to change them; I will only need to love them. Only the universal dimensions that embody the lifestory of every human make it possible for me to do this, for these dimensions mark every person's life as authentic and important. We are each the recipients of an incredible Love which not only rescues us from obscurity but sets us on our feet as channels of that Love for this world and all that is in it.

This journey began in a lonely mountain canyon in Idaho where the roots of this earthly expression of me were first planted, and it has moved to a hill overlooking the San Francisco Bay where those roots are still growing. Here in this spot that I have reserved for my own best creative listening and writing I have watched the sun climb high above the eastern knolls and bathe the world with the warmth of new

beginnings. I have followed the swirling course of fog moving through the Golden Gate and enfolding a city in its feathery embrace till only spires of its tallest buildings poked through in mute reminder to the life below. I have observed the fading sun descend into the Bay and streak the heavens with a final touch of rose, violet, and gold tints that blazed a majestic promise of return. And I have seen the myriad of man-made lights come on, one by one, until the world at my feet lay like a fairyland of sparkling jewels flung carelessly by some giant hand.

My view of this world has changed dramatically in some forty odd years. I am on a different mountain now. I have the perception of the greater distances of infinity, and I have the view of the awe-some grandeur of the cosmos. In my heart there is a wisdom, a patience, and a serenity which is the gift of the years, the gift of my own life-story. I would not trade this mountain for any that I have climbed in the past, but I will relinquish it for that one whose peaks I see shining dimly through the mists. I must now wait for the unfolding days to move me toward any new peaks and to the journey of the last breath. Then this story will merge into the beginning of a new story which I shall take up on the heights of another realm, a realm only faintly perceived, but which will very much be an ongoing of all that I have become here.

There is an old Mormon hymn, written to encourage the hearts of the saints in their perilous trek westward, which I have sung often

and from which I have always derived a certain encouragement.

Come, come, ye saints, no toil nor labor fear,
But with joy wend your way.
Though hard to you this journey may appear,
Grace shall be as your day.
'Tis better far for us to strive
Our useless cares from us to drive.
Do this, and joy your hearts will swell.
All is well! All is well!

I sing it today as the starsong of my soul -- life is good, God is good, and all is well, always.

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